

DAYS SPENT ON A DOGE'S FARM



MARGARET SYMONDS

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DAYS SPENT ON A
DOGE'S FARM

BY

MARGARET SYMONDS

(MRS. W. W. VAUGHAN)

WITH A NEW PREFACE
AND 16 NEW ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON : T. FISHER UNWIN
ADELPHI TERRACE. MCMVIII

DG975
P13589
1908

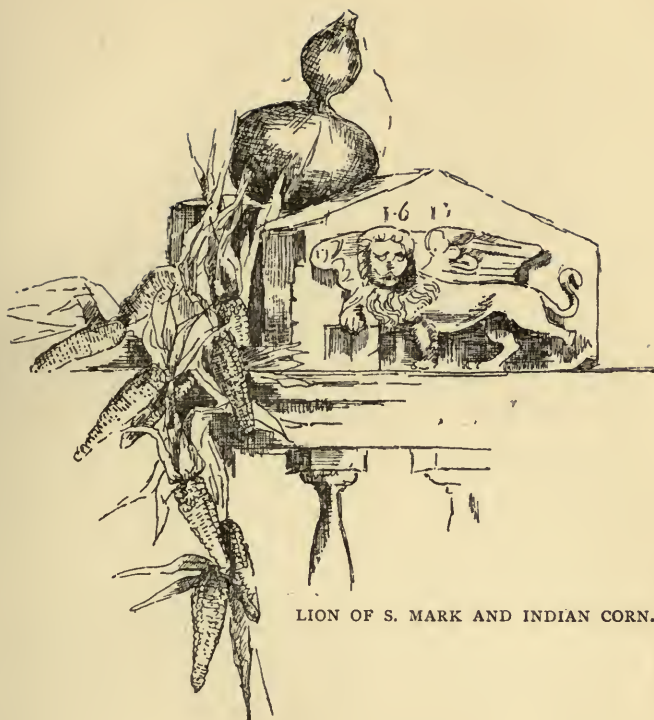
To
MY FATHER,
JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

"O love, we two shall go no longer
To lands of summer across the sea."

TENNYSON.

First Edition, 1893
Second Edition, 1908

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LION OF S. MARK AND INDIAN CORN.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

A MEMORY OF COUNTESS PISANI

ON a night in May, 1888, and therefore all but twenty years ago, I visited Vescovana for the first time. My father and I, Mr. H. F. Brown, and his mother, and our two Venetian gondoliers, left Venice in the afternoon, and in the dusk, some five hours later, drove up to the doors of the great villa on the mainland to which we had been bidden by its owner. My father and I were complete strangers to our hostess, Countess Pisani, though she knew and long had loved my father through his books; and the invitation was to me a sort of fairy-tale episode in our Venetian life. I was then a young girl, full of enthusiasm and prepared to accept every form of romantic impression. The great house, set down in the heart of that immense plain, the scent of syringa in the outer air, the hundreds of crimson roses and the lights in the rooms within—these, and

the sight of the gardens, the farms, and all the curious Italian country life as revealed by the sun the following morning, made a memorable impression on my brain. But far surpassing them was the figure of the lady herself whose spirit permeated and glorified that little paradise upon the plains, and I instantly felt that I was in the presence of a great personality. The affection and admiration thus begun, only continued to develop through the many years in which I had her friendship.

It was near the eve of Christmas, some two months ago, that, sitting at breakfast in the Yorkshire dawn, the snow on the moors, a thin, black veil of winter mists upon the wild and sombre landscape without, I received a letter suggesting that the old book written about those early days in Italy should be reprinted. I went therefore to the wooden book box which held their story, and pulled the papers out. Stray flowers fell from amongst them—bits of brown roses, portions of a curious purple creeper¹ which grew upon the pergola at Vescovana, photographs of a very primitive order, prints and MS. and poems. Amongst them was a packet of the Contessa's own letters, written in a strong and very remarkable hand. The pen which wrote them was rather more of a weapon than a friend—it was a sharp, incisive tool, used to convey very inadequately the

¹ *Periploca græca*.

vital thought of its owner. Yet these letters, with their perfect simplicity and their marked individuality, tell the story of the Contessa's later years far more effectively than anything I myself could say, and I have therefore made some selections from them in the following slight sketch of one, whose loving and vital presence no mere written words can ever bring again.

For the bare bones of facts in the life of the Contessa I cannot do better than quote the following short notice which appeared in the *Times* of July 1, 1902, a few days after her death : " Evelina, Countess Pisani, died on June 25th at her country residence near Este, in North Italy. She was the daughter of Doctor Julius van Millingen, the physician who attended Byron on his deathbed at Missolonghi, and who was known as an antiquary and an eminent medical man in Constantinople, where his daughter was born in 1830. She was brought up by her grandmother, an Englishwoman, in Rome, until she was eighteen, when she rejoined her father in Constantinople. About 1852 she married Count Almorò Pisani, the head of the ancient Venetian family of that name, who died some fourteen years ago, leaving no issue. Since then Countess Pisani has managed his large estates in North Italy. She was a staunch friend of England and of English ideas, and in her beautiful home she welcomed a large circle of

English friends, who will recall her intellectual gifts and great charm of manner. Her brother, Alexander van Millingen, is the well-known professor of history, in the Robert College at Constantinople."

The Contessa was very fond of telling stories about her youth, and I wish very much that I could remember some of these. Of her early childhood, and of the period spent in Rome with her English grandmother, she had many delightful tales. Her education was pretty severe, and she attended the Convent of the Sacré Coeur as a day scholar.

The most passionate affection of her youth was centred on her father—the English doctor in Constantinople; and for her two brothers—Alexander, the professor who constantly visited her in later days at Vescovana, and Charles, a physician, she ever felt the deepest affection. But the circumstances of her life had cut her off almost completely from her family at the period when I myself knew her.

The Roman days passed, and as a girl of eighteen she returned for a time to live with her father at Constantinople. Some years later she was invited by a friend to visit her in Venice and to see something of Venetian society. She has often told me of that time, and how, on the night of her arrival, she was taken to the opera, wearing the wonderful

Eastern dress which, in the days of Lord Byron, was at once curious and the height of fashion. Her beauty and her intelligence made a great impression on the Venetians. A short time afterwards she was married to Count Almorò Pisani, the last of his name, in the church of St. Mark at Venice.

The doors of Venetian society were at once open to Evelina Pisani, and I think that for a time she frequented it. But a merely social life of this particular type—Venetian society was in no ways intellectual at that period—could not satisfy her ardent and inquiring spirit, and she found that the large spaces and repose of the old farmhouse upon the mainland suited better with her deeper tastes; her husband also preferred that life, and more and more they lived at Vescovana, the young wife spending ever longer periods among her books and flowers, for neighbours practically did not exist. She had a pair of ponies, and drove herself constantly across the plain and into the Euganean hills, which she thus learned to know intimately. No children were born of the marriage, and in those days she took very little personal part in the management of the property. Her energies were therefore devoted to the house and garden, with the results described in Chapter II. of this book. It was probably in those days of comparative leisure that she accumulated her deep know-

ledge of Italian, English, French, and other literatures. She has often described to me the immense length of the days, and the yards of embroidery with which she filled the gaps. In summer she and her husband would go to the Alps, as so many Italian families do, staying at St. Moritz or at Pontresina ; and here she acquired that love for mountain flowers which in later years led to the construction of the "Mockery," or rock garden of the Lombard Plain. In winter they would occasionally go to Venice and live awhile in their apartments in the Palazzo Barbaro. But they always returned to the farm, and to its long and splendid isolation.

It was perhaps a curious life for a beautiful and highly accomplished woman of the world, but women of great intellect often, in lives of this sort, develop inherent powers—powers which would in all probability have been dwarfed in drawing-rooms. The fashion of ladies writing garden-books had not yet dawned, but I have always dimly felt that the Contessa was one of the unconscious godmothers of that peculiar form of literature.

When I came to know her, the struggle with circumstance—for a struggle there must always be when strong characters are forced into distinct and foreign moulds—was over. She had found her plateau in life. With the natural elements of that plateau she had of course to war ; "*Chi ha terra*

ha guerra” was a favourite maxim of hers. Who cannot in bitterness repeat it, even if his “*terra*” consist of a suburban square; and hers were 3,000 acres of cultivated land with the accompaniment of Italian peasants, Italian bailiffs, and Italian government. She was partly English, and many of her instincts were English; but she had French blood too, and her extraordinarily fertile brain was open to a hundred cosmopolitan ideas. I think that this was what made her so passionately *just*. She was free of national prejudices. She loved righteousness for righteousness’ sake. She loved Italy with that almost despairing love which all her lovers have shared, and she was fevered by her sorrows and perplexities. She was proud of the great Venetian name she bore: “You know I am devoted to the Pisanis,” she writes. “I live under their roof, as the peasants say; whatever I enjoy belonged to them, and it seems to me as if I could never thank them enough or praise them as they deserve.”¹

We most of us, I suppose, live double lives—those of the spirit and those of facts—and as we grow older we learn, I think, more and more how the best of these with very many people is the hidden life. It is certain that the public (burying perhaps its own better part and appearing in the

¹ For an account of this great Venetian family, see Chapter I. of this book.

guise of a gossip), is often the unsympathetic spectator, rather than the intuitive friend. The public, in the case of Countess Pisani, noticed a powerful lady driving, with the utmost regularity, from farm to farm in her carriage, and finding a great many obvious faults with their management. It was perhaps impossible that they should see the loving, the deeply intellectual and sympathetic woman's heart, which beat so passionately for the good of the land, at the back of all this outward formality.

"*Chi ha terra ha guerra.*" "It is a daily struggle and a conflict," she writes. "It is not easy to do one's duty. Each in his own corner has many difficulties. The great thing is to do it bravely, and God, in His mercy and goodness, gave you and me such gifts that we cannot complain, but must use them to the greatest advantage of those who live together with ourselves in life.'

She had difficult clay to work upon. She produced a fine model, but at an incalculable expense of spirit. The Italian peasant in Central Italy is often refined and highly intelligent. In the Padovana, he is of a coarser and heavier mould, and his mind has been warped by centuries of apparently fruitless labour and an old tradition of serfdom. "How difficult it is to understand the peasants!" she writes in one letter. "They reason like children, and when you are kind to them they act like spoilt children.

I wish you had been present at an interview that I had this morning with the Sindaco of Stanghella and the Brigadiere di Carabinieri. They agreed with me, and confessed that they found it very puzzling."

In her work for the improvement of the land and of human life, she got but little, and that most unintelligent, help from the local authorities. The keeping of the public road was, at Vescovana, even as it is sometimes in an English village, no great advertisement of parish government. On a January day we read: "I went out to-day for the first time in the little carriage, but could not go very far, the road being one large piece of ice, and the Village Commune won't do anything to prevent men, women, cattle and horses, from breaking their necks. It makes me wretched. One of the big people of the Municipality broke his leg this morning, and we are told the orders were given to have a 'little sand thrown on the road next week!'" . . . Again, in March: "I went out early this morning visiting the stables, and was distressed, as usual, to see the fields of beautiful wheat covered with water; there is so much mismanagement from want of the right knowledge. When you think that Italy could be one of the richest countries in the world, it really makes you miserable to see such loss for want of proper

understanding. ‘*L’Italia farà da se,*’ and we can see what use they make of it.” Here is more on the same topic, with an amusing account of a local lawsuit: “Italy will always be the same, private quarrels becoming of general interest. Guelph and Ghibiline are revived at any moment. We have had ourselves a fight, and eighteen men, armed with knives and spades and pitchforks, who assailed my party, dispersed them and destroyed the battlements (a hedge), and took possession of the land. High words passed on both sides. I was not present, but the chief of the opposite party was on the spot, and threatened death! ‘*Dirai alla Contessa che, l’uno o l’altro deve morire sul posto!*’ This message was faithfully delivered to me with a glee in the eye of my men, and I went to law, not feeling strong enough to be either a Gremio or a Lambertazzo. The case was brought before the Prefettura di Monselice, and all the ‘*bravi*’ of the neighbourhood were called by my opponent as witnesses. Such black beards and ferocious faces you never saw but in the Middle Ages! It was nothing but a show to intimidate. I am sure the beards were made of black cloth, and the eyes were bits of charcoal. I had also forty witnesses, but they all looked like blue baboons, and trembled in the most disgraceful manner! There were also three lawyers to defend me—a Christian, a Jew, and a

Heathen. . . ." In a time of drought and strike, she writes: "I have had all kinds of difficulties in the farms; this dreadful drought deprives my beautiful oxen of every comfort. We have no straw for their beds, hardly any hay for their food, and no green grass. I rush from one stable to the other in a wild state of excitement, storming right and left. Friends left me in the midst of what I call a strike. The harvesters refused to go to work (not one man of last year came). We have come to an agreement, and to-day, being Sunday, those who consent to work are invited to a meeting under my *barchesse*." ¹

But her dealings with the land and its inhabitants were by no means those of a perpetual hurricane. There were calm moments—moments of blessed rest and thankfulness. I think I must quote in full one Christmas letter, which shows her in her quiet life at home:—

Jan. 6, 1889. "I thought of you to-day more than usual, and I am sure you would have enjoyed to see all the children of the village who came to get the *Strega* under the arcades. Poor little things! I did not give them much, and yet they were made very happy with oranges, cakes, and 'rosolio' (a sweet red wine made up of roses). They all screamed at the tops of their voices, and it

¹ Arcades,

was with great difficulty that their parents succeeded in persuading them, when it was almost dark, that it was time to go home. Even the dogs were merry, and I have an idea that many a cake was stolen by those dreadful brutes who are never tired of eating." (The Contessa was devoted to her big Maremma dogs, whose beauties and whose vices she loved to dwell upon.) "The day was most beautiful, and the sky as pure and intensely blue as it is in the Engadine. . . . I ought to have answered your last letter and told you how happy it made me, and how glad to get an insight of your father's study. When I feel cold (it sometimes happens in this big room), I dream of his big stove made of green serpentine; '*Je vois cela d'ici et je m'y chauffe.*' Do tell me how you passed your Christmas. . . . My own was very solitary. I put a few bunches of holly round the house, and had a *real* plum-pudding for myself and servants. On the whole, I think I enjoyed myself—'*les lieux ont une âme,*' and the soul of Vescovana has always inspired me to thankfulness. There is something soothing in these old walls, and I love them. . . . I hope you received your angels, and that you were pleased with them. Fra Angelico!—What a lovely creature he was? Such as your father would fancy, with a Roman Catholic Church as bodiless as his angels."

.

It is no easy matter to manage a schoolroom full of strong and overbearing young people, but often it happens that in the same house, up in the nursery, the most fascinating creatures of this earth live their enchanted lives, and fill the heart of the weary governess with joy and with refreshment. To the Contessa, the peasants, the bailiffs, the Members of the Municipio, were the schoolroom, but the "*bovi*" were her babies. How she loved them. What soothing certain joy their presence brought her. Sometimes I have thought this almost weirdly powerful love was explained by a pile of little caps and camisoles which had never been used, and which, with limp and faded laces, lay in the big linen presses of the "Farm." All through her letters runs the tale of the cattle's praises—the spirit relaxes, the words flow out, easy and placid :—

"Hinc albi, Clitumne, greges et maxima taurus
Victima, sæpe tuo perfusi flumine sacro,
Romanos ad templa deum duxere triumphos.

Don't you see my Magnifico? Ah! Virgil was a Gromboolian!"

The naming of the oxen was a constant source of pleasure and excitement. In the second letter which she wrote to me, she says: "I must not conclude my letter without giving you every good news of my cattle. There were many births and no deaths

lately. We have now a Sarpio (for Fra Paolo), Steno, Reale, and last, but not least, Farnesina—a perfect beauty, daughter of Farnese and Parma. Many that you left in idle thoughtlessness have taken to working very hard, and do their duty very bravely. When you come again I must introduce you to ‘Oca’ and ‘Strindola.’ They are remarkable for their intelligence, and so amusing in their ways. . . . There was a case of sudden death. Poor Francese died while he was ploughing, and I feel his loss. Such a beautiful *bove* cannot be easily replaced.”

After her love for her oxen came her love for the garden. This last was perhaps the earlier love, and she certainly never lost it, though the love for her cattle held the stronger fibres of her heart in later years. The garden was a toy—a delightful plaything. It was well that it meant nothing more serious, for infinite were the trials and disappointments of the gardener in that sun-baked plain, exposed to a continual succession of drought and flood and ice, according to the season—a climate in which such a luxury as an English lawn had better be put into one’s bag of dreams from the very outset. Still the garden was there, and an exquisite one of its kind, and when man proved himself at times vile and unworthy, it was to the garden that her thoughts were ever turned. “I assure you,

my dear ——, that when I have discussed for some time with these men" (this refers to a dispute with her bailiffs) "I am perfectly exhausted—I cannot write nor read, and I go round the garden to gather new thoughts and new strength."

It was while "going round the garden gathering strength" that I first really learned to know her, for I too gardened in the regions of my mind, and at first it was the only subject I ventured to discuss with this wonderful lady. That is where I see her best in memory, after twenty years, her splendid skirts, for she was always a joy to look at, gathered on her arm as she went slowly, stooping lovingly, from bed to rock, from bush to bower. She never did much manual work herself, although she loved to imagine it: "I have at last begun my rock garden, and wish your mother were here to help me. We would have our hands in mud all the day long and feel so happy!" In another place, she writes: "If we are all flooded here on the plain, I come up to Davos to help your mother with her Alpine Garden."

At last we are told that the famous rock garden is completed: "It looks as if nothing will grow—a large Mockery all over!" And then the fountain, dedicated to me, is put up. It came from Milan—a beautiful marble shell, with a dolphin from which the water ran: "No one is allowed to wash their

hands in your fountain before you come yourself, and if A. attempts to do so, he will have his hands chopped off on the spot!" But there was not much time for washing hands. Big boards had to be prepared with the words "Mockery" and "Walls of Baal" printed upon them, so that there could be no mistake. We ransacked the hills for roots, we brought back from the Alps every description of campanula and saxifrage. Great bushes of rhubarb and splendid flags flourished and spread, but the frailer flowers, with scarcely an exception, withered away. One great southern squill survived and blossomed nobly. "The beautiful Scilla Maritima you brought to me from Leucaspide came out the other day on the ruins of the temple of Baal. It is the loveliest thing you can imagine—tall, slender, and such a spike of white and delicate flowers." There was something glorious, because half preposterous in the "Mockery": "The Empress (of Germany) was delighted with the Mockery. I had to explain it to her, and I have an idea she is going to have an opposition 'Mockery.'"

Perhaps the winter on that Paduan plain was her worst enemy, with its long fogs and intense cold. The winter of 1891 was cruel in Northern Italy. She excuses her long silence: "The fact is, I have little to say to make my letters pleasant. I could

speak of nothing but of the dreadful weather we have had lately, and of the mountains of snow I see from my windows both on the side of the public road as well as that of the garden. Poor babies ! ” (her bulbs), “ I must try to forget them, and write to Barr to send me bulbs and roots again.” A little later, however, we get better news : “ We went out early in the rain and took the few flowers that have come out : squills, dog-tooth violets and iris stylosa and reticulata are lovely all at present. The rest have suffered very much. The violets are just beginning. I envy Mother’s window garden. My daffodils are very poor, only a few Bicolor which —— gave me. They are very large and beautiful, like everything that comes from Barr.”

Mr. Barr, I may say, was the prophet of this Italian garden. “ Dear, dear, dear Barr,” she writes, when in the exalted throes of creating her formal garden—called, after one in Mr. Blomfield’s book, Crispin de Pass. “ Barr has sent me no end of bulbs, and for two days I have not been out of the garden. I have left stables and maize, your letters and everything else unfinished. How may we adorn dear Crispin de Pass ! How we look forward to the time when he will surpass even the garden of S.” (a hated rival on the plain)—“ is more than I can tell ! ”

Sad days came in harvest-time when, more than at

any other season, the new plants required water. "The gleaners" (an army of peasant girls who habitually weeded and watered in the garden),—"the gleaners go on in the most marvellous manner—they get so excited in the fields that they even refuse to come to the garden. They seem indifferent to the beauties of Crispin de Pass."

So far I have spoken only of the outward facts and work in the life of this remarkable woman, whom a mere chance had placed so early in her life in a remote, neglected, and by no means artistically beautiful region of Northern Italy. I wish to pass on to her friendships, which were an integral part in her life. But it may be as well to review her position first.

Countess Pisani loved beauty, she loved art and refinement, and the intercourse of mind. Everything in the whole of her being drew her in those directions. But destiny, or duty, decided that the greater part of her existence should be passed in a huge plain redeemed from sterility only by its accumulations of centuries of mud. This puts the case nakedly, and the pages of the following book will not really refute the statement, for there may be halos about the most uncompromising faces. She lived on a great mud plateau between two dangerous rivers which threatened continual destruction (see p. 251).

She lived among a race of people who could no more understand her than they could alter the courses of the stars. She had a large intellect, and she grasped the fact that by ceaseless vigilance and cultivation the mud-bank could yield a splendid store of crops, and its people and its animals could enjoy, instead of merely enduring, a life of comparative happiness and plenty. She made it her business to insure these facts ; and she succeeded. She had a splendid vivid spirit, and she never for a day allowed the flame to flicker ; but there must have been moments, in her early widowhood anyhow, when only some intense feeling of loyalty could have held her to her post. She was a woman absolutely alone. She might well have sat upon a throne, for she had a genuine capacity for rule, and I never knew her waver when once her judgment was convinced. She admitted no compromise. Some may have said that there was more of the tyrant than of the diplomat in her ; but this was what made her great. She had inborn convictions about breeding and race, and the superiority of mind over matter.

Unlike some labourers, she actually lived to see the fruits of her vineyard. The beautiful order of her farms, the neatness of her roads, the Eastern splendour within the walls of what, after all, was just a huge farmhouse ; the general healthy and cleanly look of her peasants, and the surpassing beauty of

her cattle—all these things had become proverbs in the surrounding country before her death. But before passing to her outside interests, there is one point on which I must touch, and without which the courage of her life could not actually be understood. The just man is not necessarily popular or beloved in his day, however much his works may live after him. I think that most of the women, and many of her farmers honoured and respected her ; but she always, even in the heat of summer, drove about her property in a shut carriage. At the head of her bed, and just within reach of her hand, a loaded pistol, polished and ready, invariably hung. This weapon, which meant so much in that courageous life, caused in my young democratic (and very ignorant) days, an indescribable revolt. As I sat by her bedside in the early morning, talking quietly with my friend—the doves and all those birds she loved cooing and twittering at her window, and the scent of the hidden garden beyond blown in over the pergola—I always tried to see her face without the weapon up above it, for it was, if I may say so, the pin in the porridge of my love for her. In later years I have been able to understand more wholeheartedly the courage of that noble life of an intellectual, sensitive, and loving woman, set in such an alien solitude and all the struggle that it must have meant for her.

I have spoken of her as living her life alone, but I would wish to mention here the name of that faithful friend and guardian of her interests—the parish priest, Don Antonio, whose ceaseless care and vigilance saved her at very many points from what would otherwise have been the unendurable strain of a solitary rule. Perhaps he did not take much part in the personal management of the property, but he kept the accounts—every document passed through his hands—he interceded for the poor, and gave interest to her leisure hours by his own remarkably wide intellectual interests. “Without Don Antonio,” writes one who knew and loved her best, “I do not see how she could have held her ground amongst a population such as that she had to deal with.”

Many people who live much alone become suspicious and morose. She, on the contrary, never lost her power of forming new friendships. “I knew —— at once,” she writes, “but I have an eye that looks into the souls of those I love, and besides, I am an old woman, accustomed to study those with whom I come in contact.” Of her strong, intuitive love for her friends, and notably for high-minded and therefore sometimes misrepresented women, touches occur again and again. They are too personal for publication, and yet with their burn-

ing declamation against the envy and meanness of detraction, they might profit any public. Beautiful herself, she loved beauty in others. In her many wonderful recollections, I can remember nothing more vivid or delightful than her accounts of the beautiful women she had known. "I wish people would admire other people without feeling envious," she cries.

It was no easy matter to fit in her friends with the daily round of her duties. She loved nothing better than to fill her big house with parties of friends, but the arrears of work to which she returned when the guests had departed were formidable. "I found out at last after sixty years that I must be left alone to be able to fulfil my duties. I get so excited when friends are staying with me that I do nothing but rush after them." . . . "I am always busy," she writes in another letter, "and my days are made very short for many reasons. I must rise very late, go to bed very early, get some rest in the middle of the day, and what time remains I have to give orders for the house, attend to business of various kinds and find moments for a little reading. I envy those who are able to do more and make their life more useful to others. I never was very strong, but of late years I begin to feel '*il peso degli anni*,' and nothing but heart and soul is young in me. I suppose that this

feeling of old age coming on makes me cling more than ever to young people." Speaking of an old lady friend she says : " Dear —— has found her way back to A., and I hope she enjoys her garden. It strikes me that she prefers roaming about to remaining quietly at home. I myself have always wished to have a large arm-chair for my old age, and to sit like a picture with plenty of young people round me." It is perhaps not necessary to say that all young people loved her in return. Almost unconsciously she taught them a hundred truths. If herself a little embittered at certain points by the spectacle of human weakness and lack of truth, she touched on this topic only lightly with her girl friends, and told them rather of all the possibilities of splendour in their lives. " I think it is good for girls of your age to have a friend much older than themselves. We can discuss many things together, and I give you a little of my experience which has brought me to love everything that is beautiful and taught me how much good is in the world." And she loved, with a sort of humble reverence, the goodness and purity of young people. Speaking of a young English girl, who certainly was above the common mould, and who possessed, combined with rare beauty, a sort of mediæval candour of soul, she says : " I never before wished for a sister, but I now see what a

blessing one can be—a long source of happiness all through life. I felt, when —— was with me, that her influence was of the best. She has done me more good than many books. How much a woman, however young, can do when she is thoroughly good and sweet! I do not think she was aware of the many lessons she gave me—sometimes it was merely a look.” It was a great pleasure to give her presents—she so delighted in even the most trifling offering. “I think you are all too good to me,” she writes, after the receipt of various roots, pictures, and curious oddments, “and I am trying to think what I can do for you. I wish I were not so old, stupid and ignorant, but I cannot help it. I feel as though I were not up to the mark, and I vainly try to improve. Of course, old age and stupidity cannot be mended, but we could do something to lessen the dose of ignorance.” Whereat she sets forth on a whole host of new studies, and re-reads Homer and buries herself in her beloved Machiavelli and Virgil. This haunting sense of mental incapacity, which I think often accompanies brain power with women whose lives are necessarily crowded with practical detail, is continually mentioned with comic lamentations. Speaking of the *Georgics*, she says: “I enjoy them so much, and yet I do not know a word of Latin (!). Some one hundred and fifty years ago I took some

lessons from a certain priest. He gave me up in despair. The fact is all my masters got tired of me ; they found me too stupid. That accounts for my extreme ignorance and incapacity for doing anything well. I am sure you have heard of, or even may have seen, women who are what the French call '*une belle laide*.' Well, there are also persons of my sort who one might call '*une stupide intelligente*.' This used to make me miserable, but now I get reconciled to my lot, and feel very thankful that I can enjoy the intelligence of other people."

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She simply adored masquerade, and she had a sort of passion for "dressing up." I shall never forget a cold April night, when the desire to see us "dressed" at any cost came up and overpowered her. My father was expected by a late train from Venice. My eldest sister and I put on our accustomed evening gowns, and appeared as usual in the drawing-room. "This cannot be," cried the Contessa, herself in splendid brocade, and she swept us to her own apartments. All the candles had to be relighted on the dressing-table. I think there were "clusters" of candles when the Contessa's toilette was in progress. The bewildered lady's-maid ransacked the cupboards and the drawers. Glorious headgear, entangled fichus, gauze Turkish

bodices and beads were lavishly overhauled. Our hair was pulled down and repinned up with the most amazing hair-pins. Glancing about me nervously and in decided discomfort, I thought that I detected an expression of amazed uncertainty on the face of the well-trained handmaiden. My father arrived—we got through the dinner. He was tired, and his head, I suppose, was full of some new scheme for work. The evening wore on, the Contessa could contain herself no longer, she was so gloriously happy in her transformations. “Well!” she cried, “and what do you think of your daughters?” My father glanced at us—“I had been thinking they looked rather untidy,” he said.

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Yes, they were gay days that young people spent under the roof of the Doge’s Farm! But she did not only see her friends at Vescovana; she sometimes went to stay in her town house at Venice, taking with her all her country retinue. Then the beautiful rooms on the *piano nobile* of the Palazzo Barbaro were opened up. They were typical Venetian rooms with long rows of Gothic windows to the drawing-room, and tiny white lions guarding the balconies. Their chief adornment was a great family portrait of Almorò II. and his family painted by Pietro Longhi. The town house was fitted up

perhaps more sumptuously than that in the country, but it had the same pervading and individual charm. There were lots of mirrors and a little fountain in the drawing-room. She always arrived with a pile of wooden boxes full of flowers, and after she had been there an hour the place looked like a bower. In October, 1889, she writes from her Venetian home: "I came here a week ago, summoned by telegram from Lady Layard. The day of my arrival I dined with Lord S. and Captain L., of the *Osborne*, and many others of the suite of the Prince and Princess of Wales. Such a contrast with the rustics of Vescovana, and their wild manners! I was invited to luncheon (at Lady Layard's) with the Royal party, and sat next to Prince George, who insisted on the necessity of my going to England. I was allowed to present to the Princess a Venetian Zecchino (Doge Pisani's). She looked pleased, and thanked me in such an unaffected, girlish way that quite took my heart. I had not seen the Prince since he was nineteen, and we remembered together Rome and the 'Moccoletti.'"

She loved to fill her house with guests. She loved to exchange the myriads of thoughts accumulated through the long weeks and months and years of her own isolated life, with men and women whose existence was passed amongst their equals in the busy world of cities.

Friends who loved the Contessa have asked that in this little sketch I should try to give some account of her curiously versatile conversation. But, alas ! there is nothing which it is more impossible to reproduce than the talk of cultivated people. It is far more easy to render the slow and painful words of peasants, though even this, as often as not, produces a mere parody. The Contessa's words are passed—they are gone, and we may not recall them. We can only say that she combined the intuitions of a woman with a virile power of reasoning, and that she would hold her own with any brilliant talker or group of talkers. Men delighted in her quick wit, realising that it was no mere outward tinsel, but covered a profound and steady source of knowledge, the product of much study and incessant thinking. Life had shown her many lessons, books perhaps had taught her even more. She looked on eagerly at the human pageant, read papers, magazines, and all new books of interest. She looked on. She was a woman of the world, but her "life of the world" was a life lived only in imagination, lived by hearsay, not by contact. She was a strong Catholic, and more and more she leant on the Church for her support. She brought a keen, if perhaps too conservative, a judgment to bear upon the politics of nations, and she drew conclusions which she had had ample leisure to

balance carefully. She passionately loved united Italy, and desired her welfare. How much one wishes that she might have lived to realise her present comparative advance and prosperity !

The strong active brain, the eager and deeply affectionate spirit could not rest. Was it wasted there in that remote farm-villa on the plains ? . . . Would we, who loved her, have had it trained on Boards and in Committee-rooms, and a tangle of so-called philanthropy and "causes" ? . . . I think we may answer No. The Contessa was fitted to her place. Like a rare jewel set in a single band of iron, she stands alone in memory. The flurry and fuss, and self-importance, of many women in small provincial towns and villages, were alien to her nature, and would indeed, had she adopted them, have spoiled her great and curious qualities.

The Contessa was fitted to her place ; and the little circle of friends who gathered round her table at rare intervals gained a unique, refreshing, and delightful human experience such as is accorded to few in a lifetime.

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I think that quite one of the most attractive points which draws imaginative young people to persons of an older generation is their link with what must always seem at least to be a more splendid past than their own present. The old age of giants dies out

before the growing one has a chance to develop, and so we always believe that the generation before our own was one of greatness, compared to which we ourselves are paltry pigmies. It is possible, of course, that the generation which grew up in the first part of the nineteenth century *was* an exceptional one—people had the “great manner” then—persons had the almost extinct noun, “presence.” The Contessa’s experience was a long one, and her memory travelled back to the great social days of Byron in Italy; when people did nothing by halves, but sat in their carriages when they crossed the Channel, and trundled in these same chariots through the gates of Rome. Italian society, too, was different then—duller probably, but grander in its exclusive isolation. There was something which savoured strongly of the “grand manner” about the Contessa’s early reminiscences. She was a wonderful *raconteuse*, and no letters and no amount of descriptive writing can ever bring back her stories and her curious and shrewd judgments.

She sat sometimes in her old Lombard house amidst the lonely plains, and looked back into the past with some stray traveller who still frequented the ruins of that world from which she herself was withdrawn some forty years ago: “The Marchese G. stayed with me some days, and we had long conversations about our Roman friends. It is so

sad for me to hear that one after the other they all are ruined. I have always been a great friend of the Borgheses, and the present prince is a particular friend of mine. I am afraid they are going to sell the palace, the villa, and their most splendid gallery of pictures. The Rome of my youth is disappearing, and I mourn over it." She fitted on to all that was best in the existing Venetian society. "Countess M. is also dead. She was comparatively a young woman—only fifty-two—and still very beautiful and full of life. Her funeral, I am told, was something splendid—such flowers as are rarely seen in Venice. . . .

"Full canisters of fragrant lilies bring,
Mixed with the purple roses of the spring."

—You see I am still reading Virgil."

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I have described her love for her actual friends, but she possessed, too, a curious faculty for visualising and actually loving people she had never seen, and some of whom were dead. She could enter with a sort of intuitive instinct into their lives. For my mother's sister, Miss Marianne North, the traveller, whom, unfortunately, she never met, she conceived one of these sincere affections, and throughout the letters there are many allusions to her, and laments that she cannot assist in the construction of the

garden. "On All Soul's Day, I remembered dear Aunt Pop, and prayed for her. I must have a part of my garden consecrated to her. I hope there will be beautiful flowers in heaven. The Turks say that to plant a flower is to do an action pleasing to God. How many thousands of good actions has your dear Aunt done in her life!"

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On June 25, 1902, the Contessa passed from this life. Her illness was very sudden. It fell on a Sunday night; in the following dawn she died. It was just in the height of the harvest season. Did she hear, as she passed, the long, low call of the reapers—that cry which had always reminded her of the "Muezzin" or call to prayer from the mosques in her Eastern home? One likes to think that she heard it; and men rise early in harvest-time. Her nature was spiritual, and her religious faith had long been drawing her into wider fields than those which on this earth she had so wisely tended. There was nothing to dread; no languor and no possibility of fear in her passing. One friend was with her—he who in life had been the careful keeper of her interests; otherwise she was alone. "No relation stood beside her at the last," writes the brother whom she so much loved. "There was no time for me to get to her funeral. It is sad, but there was so much loneliness and independence in her life at

Vescovana that a lonely death may seem in keeping with what went before."

They buried her beside her husband in the chapel at the end of the garden which she had planned and planted, and where she had loved every leaf and bud.

"*Chi ha terra ha guerra.*" She was tired like all hard workers, and people who, "unable to shatter this world to bits," at least "remould it closer to the heart's desire."

This is a translation of the Latin inscription written on her grave:—

"Here sleeps Evelina, Countess Pisani, widow of Almorò Pisani, whose life may be summed up in these short words, which she herself desired should be carved here :

"Behold, I have loved justice and hated iniquity."

MARGARET VAUGHAN.

GIGGLESWICK, YORKSHIRE,

February 18, 1908.

PREFACE

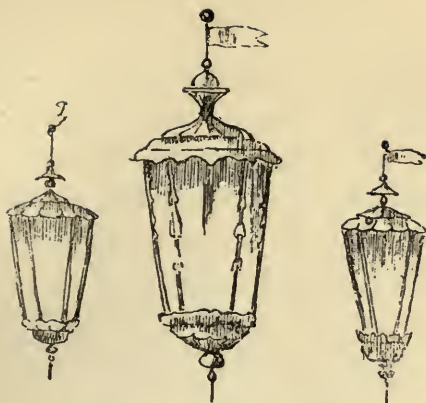
IT was under my father's influence and with his help that this small book was written. Living for awhile a life apart from his, I always thought of him, and for him I chronicled the things I saw and did. When I came home we read those chronicles together, laughing at the crudities which he forgave. He promised to write an Introduction for the book, which would have brought it more together and given it a point by showing the historical interest of the country which I, through ignorance, have only superficially described; and, chiefly, he meant to dwell on Virgil's connection with the Lombard scenes.

My father and I were on our way to Vescovana, where he hoped to write this Preface, when he fell ill. In Rome he died. The writing seems to me now incomplete—a thing with the spirit gone out of it. But my father's marks are over all the manuscript; and because he liked the book, because he took an interest in it and wanted me to print

it, I do so now, and give it back to him, the strength of whose love and influence it was which taught me since childhood to love and understand a little, not only the charm of a Doge's Farm, but of the whole and living world.

MARGARET SYMONDS.

DAVOS PLATZ, *July* 3, 1893.



LAMPS OF THE PISANI ADMIRAL.

INTRODUCTION

ALL travellers beyond the Alps are well acquainted with the plain of Lombardy—that immense body of land lying like a prostrate giant over Northern Italy. The giant's head is crowned by Apennines and Alps, his feet are bathed by the Adriatic, and down his entire length run the rivers Ticino, Adige, and Po. That which I have called the giant—what is generally known as the Lombard Plain—is really a broad valley scooped out ages ago by those three great Alpine rivers. Many of its northern cities are familiar to the tourist, and it is certain that even the most hurried traveller pushes eastward to Venice. But the part which I describe is all unknown to the inquiring stranger. It offers

few attractions to the student of art or of history. The painter hitherto has shown no desire to put its charms on canvas. Quietly and unobserved life passes there. Virgil, it is true, observed it long ago. The Georgics are immortal, but the land which gave them birth is little trodden by their readers. And there the seed is sown, the corn is reaped, the grain gathered into the granaries, while the daily trains rush past to Bologna, Mantua, Venice, or Ferrara ; none of their multitudes descend upon those flat and cultivated fields which offer scant diversion to the lover of art or the seekers after pleasure. The actual interest of this country will be acknowledged by the agriculturist alone ; its attraction only by one who has abundant leisure, and takes delight in every side of Nature and in the workings of man amongst them.

The actual part of the country which I have attempted to describe goes in the maps by the name of Bassa Padovana. It is that sea of fertile land, bounded by the Euganean Hills and the Adriatic, which Shelley has described so wonderfully well. Lombardy comes up to meet it ; Venetia and Padua claim it for their own. It has a charm which is peculiar to itself—a green, grey melancholy ; an absolute and endless calm. Even in storms you feel an infinite space of heaven around the bit of sky where the hubbub rages ; and when that whole

sky is a serene blue the sense of accumulated sunshine falling unchecked across innumerable miles of unbroken fields can boast a solemn beauty all its own. Something of this charm may be found in every plain, but in this special one the nearness of the lagoons increases it, I fancy.

As I have shown in the first chapter, the country is partly artificial—that is to say, it has been cultivated with enormous pains and at great expense for over six hundred years. But even now it is yearly threatened with destruction. The river Adige crosses this smooth plain (which has a fall of only seven and a half metres in the space of thirty-four miles) before it can reach the sea. The Adige bears with it all the waters of the distant Alps, and deposits in its slow progress all those vast accumulations of mountain sediment which in due time pile up an artificial mountain in the actual bed of the river which brought them. Thus the very cause of the land's fertility (its abundant water supply) may prove its ruin; and not all the intricate system of canals and ditches can save those flourishing fields on the day when the big river breaks its banks. These banks are calculated to inspire something like panic in the mind of the most ignorant observer. They rise to a height of from twenty-six to twenty-nine feet above the level of the land, and the church-spires and houses which once commanded now are

shadowed by these mountainous dykes. Standing on their summit, you see the entire plain for miles spread like a map below you. Interminable fields of corn or maize, stretching between ditches hedged by mulberry and willow, with here and there a mud hut or a stable, now and then a small, thin campanile. In the far background faint shadows of the Alps arise, and on the breeze a suspicion of salt air is borne from the invisible lagoon.

In the heart of this country, and in the house of one of its most active inhabitants—Countess Pisani—it has often been my privilege to stay. This lady is an admirer of the works of Edward Lear, and has bestowed upon her country the name of Gromboolia, which hitherto undiscovered land is often mentioned in Lear's poems. The title is so exactly adapted to the country that I shall not scruple to adopt it in the following pages. She has also called her house the "Doge's Farm." For it was in Gromboolia that the families of old Venetian doges made their land settlements ; and I have shown in what manner the Pisani family bought and cultivated a part of it. These nobles spent most of their spare money in decorating and living sumptuously within their city palaces ; their country house was built in a style more suited to their bailiffs. It is probable that the Pisani doge never even came to

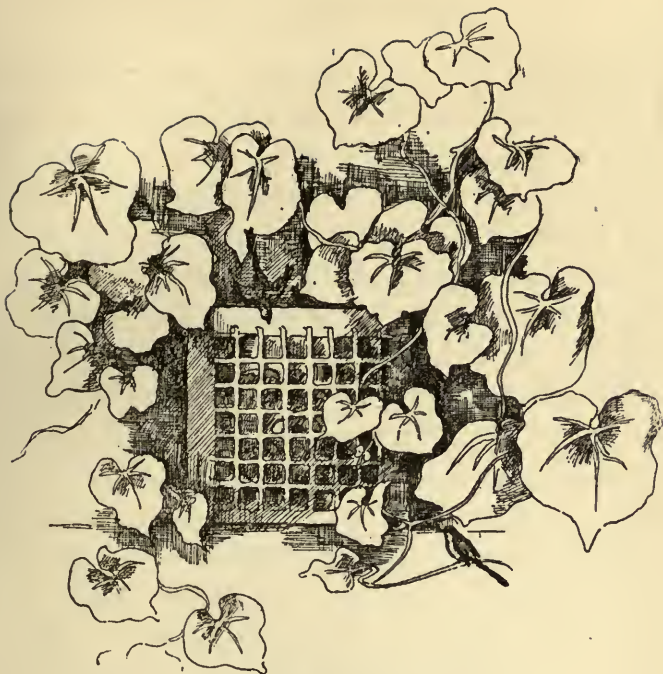
Vescovana ; it is certain that he lived long centuries after the land had been bought ; at a time, indeed, when it was falling into decay together with the Republic. I must, therefore, openly acknowledge that the title of "Doge's Farm" was bestowed more for the sake of its new and pleasing sound than for any historical fitness in the term.

Also I acknowledge that this small book is half a jest. It contains few facts and little history. Letters and notes written out of a happy time, I put together and give them here. Any local information contained in the book I owe to the kindness and accurate knowledge of my friend, Countess Pisani, who showed me the things which I describe, and who also supplied me with those photographs of Pisani portraits and of local views which have been reproduced in the following pages. The remainder of the illustrations are from my own sketches.

NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Some fresh illustrations have been added to the Second Edition of this book, but the country described is one of which it is practically impossible to obtain satisfactory photographs or sketches. The professional photographer never approaches it, and the cleverest amateur is baffled by the immensity of the

horizon and the comparative lack of foreground and of detail. Thanks to Mr. Walter Leaf, Professor F. Trombini, and my husband, I have, however, been able to gather together a few beautiful and typical pictures of the country, the people, and the oxen ; and I am happy to be able to acknowledge their help in this place.



HOME OF THE LONG-TAILED TIT.

CHAPTER I

RISE OF THE PISANIS AND PURCHASE OF VESCOVANA

THE Pisani family were not of Venetian origin. We find the following account of them in the *Libro d'Oro* : The family removed about the year 905 from Pisa to Venice, on account of party feuds, and was included in the Patriciate at the closing of the Great Council. Luigi Pisani was Doge in 1735 ; Francesco and Alvise were Cardinals of the Holy

Church ; and the family reckons a very long series of worthy citizens adorned by the most conspicuous dignities of the State."

The Pisanis were originally merchants in skins, and travelled regularly once a year from Pisa to Venice in order to sell their wares. In the year 905, as the above quotation from the *Libro d'Oro* shows, they removed from their native town and took up their final abode in Venice. We hear little or nothing of importance concerning any member of the family in connection with Venetian affairs till the year 1355, when Beltrame Pelizzaro (a Pisani) discovered the plot of Doge Marin Fallier against the Republic. This Beltrame thought himself injured by the Republic, in that his discovery had not been better rewarded, and by his huge demands for money he first brought the family into evidence.

At this time it was the fashion in Venice for its nobles and citizens to purchase estates upon the mainland, partly with a view to agricultural profit, but chiefly as a safeguard in case of an attack upon their city from country neighbours—a belt around the lagoon. Thus in the year 1468 a member of the Pisani family purchased from the Marquises of Ferrara a grant of land, and in 1688 they renewed the settlements and regained all those privileges which the Emperor Frederick II. bestowed upon the house of Este in 1200. These privileges, I may as well

mention, continue for the convenience of Vescovana proprietors up to the end of this civilised nineteenth century, and the weekly fair of the country is held regularly in the miniature piazza of Vescovana—a mere hamlet when compared with its neighbouring villages.

Azzo and Bertaldo d'Este—two generals serving in the Venetian army—had fallen into debt, and were pleased to sell this portion of their property through the hands of the Republic to Almorò III. Pisani, a wealthy Pisan merchant. The estate at that time reached from Este to the Adige, covering an expanse of some eighteen thousand acres. But the ground was absolutely uncultivated. The soil, rich though it was, suffered from lack of drainage, and was constantly under water. Little, save marsh plants and rushes, existed in these swamps. Wild duck and snipe no doubt there were in plenty. They supplied the tables of the nobles in their Venetian palaces, but the nobles themselves could not inhabit such damp wildernesses.

It is impossible for us who travel through Lombardy nowadays, and see it in its present finished and excellently fertile condition, to realise from what a chaos this cultivation first arose. It must, however, be remembered that, though soil and climate have undoubtedly been favourable, the work of men and oxen has been colossal on this great delta of the Alpine rivers, and that the drainage of many thou-

sands of square acres, with a fall of only some eight to ten metres to the sea, has been a stupendous feat requiring centuries of patient toil and hidden labour.

From the middle of the fifteenth to the end of the nineteenth century the Pisanis have tended and cared for their grant of land. If the dead indeed walk, Almorò III. Pisani, the old Pisan merchant, who purchased it more than five hundred years ago, may feel just pride in prowling unseen across his fat and flourishing country. Fields upon fields of waving wheat he there will see ; trim-clipped acacia hedges lining the roads, and mulberries with vines upon them to separate the wheat and corn. The young maize shoots from shining sods, and quiet oxen, tall and white, stand in their well-kept stalls. No inch is left untrodden or uncared for, and so it is all over Lombardy. The cultivated fields stretch on for miles. They lap the feet of the Euganeans, they kiss the slopes of the Apennines, and end by the Adriatic.

In writing about the Pisanis I must not omit to mention one of the Venetian Republic's greatest heroes, namely, Vettor Pisani, the admiral who in the year 1378 saved Venice from the Genoese at a minute when indeed she was almost vanquished. The admiral, it is true, belonged to a different branch of the Pisani family to those of whom I write, but his name, so famous in history, will inevitably recur to the mind of the reader.

We read later in the *Libro d'Oro* that two of the family obtained the title of cardinal—Francesco and Alvise, an uncle and nephew. The nephew spent his days in scheming for the advancement of his uncle to the Holy See. But the plot was discovered early, and led to the ruin of both. The fresco portrait of Cardinal Francesco, fresh and vivid in colour, still looks down from the walls of the big room at Vescovana.

In 1735 Alvise Pisani was created Doge. This was in the extreme decadence of the Republic, at a period of which there is little to recall. Luigi's life is interesting for things outside Venice itself. He was first sent as Venetian ambassador to the courts of France and England. To the latter country he went in the year 1702 to offer the congratulations of the Venetian Republic to Queen Anne upon the occasion of her accession. Amongst the Pisani pictures at the Palazzo Barbaro in Venice there is a portrait of this English queen, presented probably by herself at the time. There is also a very fascinating picture of the ambassador's arrival in London: a thoroughly Venetian conception of the Tower of London and the Thames.

It was Alvise's son—Almorò Luigi Pisani—who, through his immense ambition and love of luxury, acquired during his residence at the French court, practically ruined the Pisani family. Luigi, god-

child of Louis XIV. of France, was, like his father, chosen by the Venetian Republic for their ambassador to foreign courts. In the year 1795 he was recalled to Venice from London, and returning, full of his newly-acquired tastes, he determined to spend his fortune upon some monumental show. He purchased land upon the Brenta, a little way out of Padua, instead of using his own land at Vescovana, and there he built his palace of Strà.

Strà may now be seen—a splendid edifice in splendid grounds. Its trees are planted in geometrical designs: towers and statues, elaborate iron gates and temples lead up to it. But the house is uninhabited, abandoned by owners who could not desire, even if they possessed the wealth, to inhabit such a soulless monument. Strà is a mighty pleasure house fit for a selfish soul, a silly king surrounded by a troop of idle courtiers to take his summer ease in. But put down square on the bare Venetian plain it becomes a mockery. Little hills, deep woods, and running rivulets are needed for palaces like these. Maize fields clash with hornbeam labyrinths, and the big unshadowed sun is pitiless in bare Venetia.

To cover the building expenses of Strà, Luigi called continually for money from his bailiffs at Vescovana. When these supplies were exhausted the bailiffs were forced to borrow money. Consequently when the father of the last owner succeeded

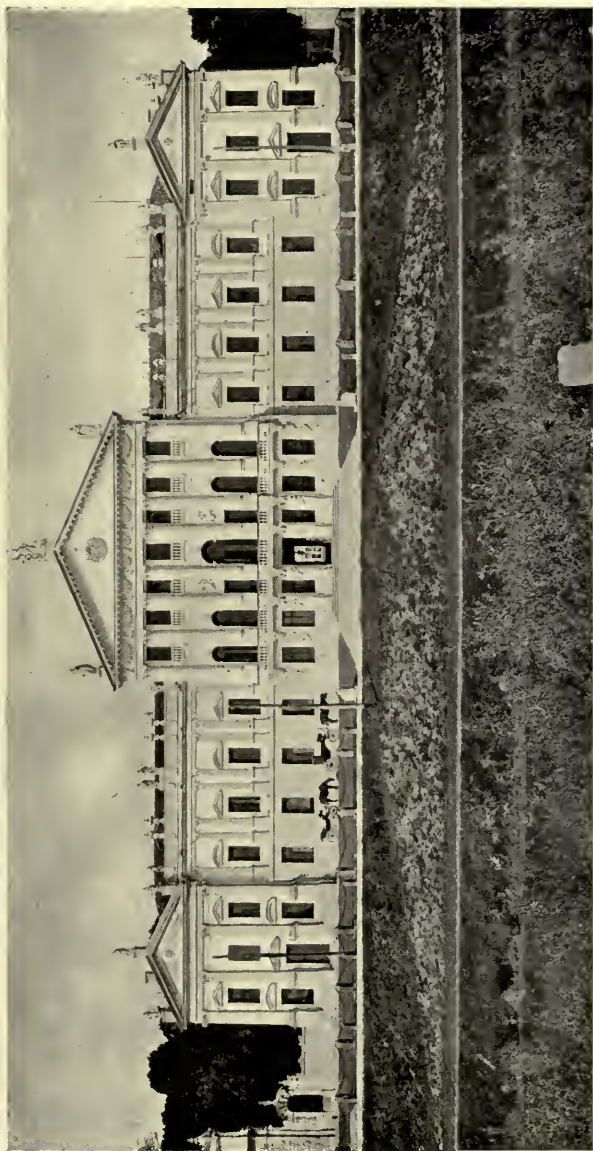


Photo by Alinari

THE PISANI PALACE AT STRA



to the property he found it so heavily mortgaged that his whole life's energy was spent in the attempt to bring it back to some state of order and freedom. One jewel and joy alone is left to the Pisanis from the folly of Luigi, and that is the portrait of himself and his family painted by Longhi. This picture hangs in the drawing-room of the present owner's house at Palazzo Barbaro in Venice. Here we meet a bright-eyed, laughing lady in flowered brocade, surrounded by a tumbling heap of very fat and fascinating children. Some older men and mythological figures stand behind her. A Pisani brother is in the foreground wearing black satin and a white periwig, and Luigi stands behind him pointing to a distant landscape, where the buildings of Strà rise over the tree-tops. This picture is so living, so vivid in colour, that one seems to know and love the people painted there and to join them in laughter and in the pleasure of their costly toy.

Luigi's grandchildren and great-grandchildren put all their energies into bringing the estates of Vescovana into order. They abandoned Strà, they left their palaces in Venice, and the last of the Pisanis, Almorò III., lived almost entirely in the country, where, with the help of his English wife, he worked to make Vescovana the model "Doge's Farm," which we who go there now regard with such delight, and where we spend such pleasant days.



BOCCA DELLE DENONCIE SEGRETE.

CHAPTER II

THE MAKING OF THE DOGE'S FARM

IT is not easy to describe the Doge's Farm to those who have not been in Italy. It would not be easy to describe to an Italian, who had never visited England, an English manor-house and its surrounding scenes. In many ways the two resemble each other, and work on the same principles, yet it would be difficult to find poles wider apart than the village-green and the southern piazza. Both

serve the same purpose. How differently is life conducted in each! In England you talk of the church tower, in Italy of the campanile. The English rector will very likely know how many owls have built in his tower, and it is possible that the young men of his parish may have accomplished a chime, which they will ring on Sunday morning, when the people of the village and the inhabitants of the "house" go quietly to church. In Italy, on the other hand, the owls haven't much of a chance, for the campanile is public property. Any lounge, bored by the piazza, may rush upon the bell-ropes in the campanile at any hour of the day, and pull them singly or in numbers, till the bells clash above him. On Sundays the girls will trip through the Italian piazza in thin lace veils—as across the English green in sailor hats.

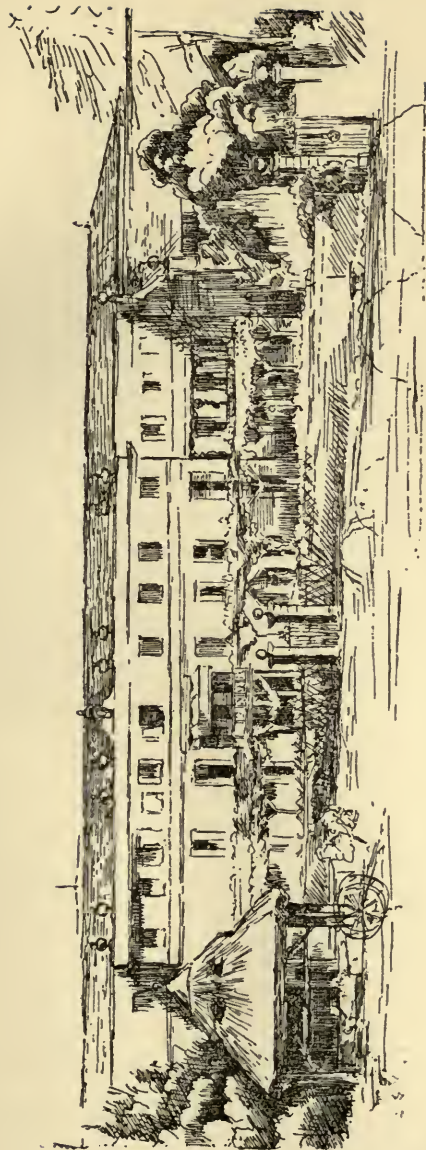
Love and calm may grow round the green, but romance and southern callousness are bred in the piazza.

The Doge's Farm remains at root absolutely Italian, though a tinge of England entered with an English bride. This is chiefly marked by the manner in which the villa has been shut off from the piazza. In most Italian villages the two are more merged into one another.

Vescovana lies beside the canal of Santa Caterina, about twenty miles from Padua. Its nearest railway

station is Stanghella, but the express trains from Venice to Florence only stop at Rovigo, which is seven miles from Vescovana and the largest town in the district. Even as far back as the fifteenth century we find the name of Vescovana printed on local maps. It is a small village, chiefly composed of low mud huts, which straggle singly down the banks of the canal. The piazza is deeply shadowed by acacia-trees, and is a cool and pleasant place where the market is held on Fridays. Here, too, on big feast days the procession leaves the church and makes the round of the square. To the left the priest's house is built—a small cottage almost hidden by its magnolia-trees and creeping plants. Next to this comes the campanile—one of those slender brick buildings peculiar to Lombardy, and quite disconnected with the body of the church, as is the fashion in Gromboolian bell-towers. The church itself is large, its façade painted in pure white. On Sundays the entire population waits outside its doors till a Pisani is prepared to go to mass. The mass also waits, for patriarchal principles are preserved on the Doge's Farm.

The whole of the third part of the triangle is filled by the villa, but the house is so low, and is painted in so dark a colour, that at first you scarcely discover its presence there as you approach through the sunlight of the road. Also it is surrounded by



THE DOGE'S FARM ON THE SOUTH SIDE.

tall shrubs and trees, and there is a sombre, mysterious look about the ancient building which has given rise to many local myths. The central part is bare of creepers, but the long wings which stretch away almost out of sight—so absurdly long do they appear to be—are covered with a dense growth of ivy and are used above as granaries. Birds and big tussore moths, mice, snails, and lizards make this creeper their abode. It is splendid cover for the naturalist. Over the front door, the parti-coloured lioness of the Pisanis ramps above the date, M.D.CXIII., when the house was last renewed.

From this rather sombre approach one suddenly passes through the halls and out to the south side, which is most literally the sunny side of the Doge's Farm. Here the light blazes on yellow walls; here the bees have their hives, the dogs their home, and the hum of life comes on the air from the stables and the kitchen. There is, in fact, an accumulation of warmth, and sound, and colour, which people passing along the outside road have never dreamed of. At any season of the year you will find that southern garden full of flowers, for she who made it loves it well. The garden is the sole creation of a modern English fancy, and has nothing to do with the old Pisani nobles. They did not use their spare ground thus, but planned it in a stiffer style, and for purposes of use, not beauty (see p. 69).

In the year 1850, Count Almorò III., the last of the Pisanis of San Stefano, came into the property. A few years later he married, and brought his young English bride to live with him upon the Doge's Farm. Her first impressions of the place were not exactly pleasant. The great long villa stood bare and flat upon the plain. No single tree shielded it from the baking suns of summer, no flower-bed was there to strengthen the buds of spring. And worst of all, the one claim of the big house to architectural beauty, its colonnaded flight of entrance steps, had been ruthlessly torn down to suit the fashion of the day, and to flatter the imagined tastes of an English bride. The garden consisted of square plots of earth, hedged in with box. Its principal features were the two huge threshing-floors in front of the dining-room windows. On these squares all the wheat of the entire property was spread, threshed, and stacked in season. A single pear-tree stood alone to tell of an avenue long ago died down, and a little rose bush, a maiden blush, had clung to its life by the threshing-floor. The high-road led straight up through the village to the front door. The peasants came and went along it. They not unnaturally lingered at times to peer through the windows and watch how the great folk ate.

The family lived entirely in the basement of the house, and passing pairs of pigs would wander in on



DOGARESSA MOROSINA MOROSINI

[From a portrait by Titian in the possession of Countess Pisani]

a warm morning to wallow on the silk divan where the young bride sat at work. Their owners, following to fetch these vagrant hogs, marvelled greatly at the new *padrona's* screams of horror. All the large rooms on the first floor were uninhabited, and used for drying beans or storing lumber. Strings were stretched from end to end of the big drawing-room, and here the washing was hung to dry. It is true that the room had the reputation of being haunted, but the beauty of its lines, the charm of its airy vastness, do away with the thought of ghosts.

Throughout the country the same condition of things existed. Roads were scarce, and often so rough and miry that they could only be crossed in heavy cars drawn by oxen. A drive from Vescovana to Este was taken by the Pisani ladies early in this century with all the pomp of a Roman procession. They mounted a springless van, and were dragged through furrowed paths by teams of white cattle to the town at the foot of the hills. To us this proceeding may sound new, and to our fancy sweet, but to the ladies and the oxen the charm was of a most mixed character.

On the north side of the house, by the door, a strange remnant of past centuries existed, namely, a lion's head carved in stone, let into the wall. Under it the words, "*Bocca delle Denoncie Segrete*," are written. Into this mysterious hole any writing

against the management of the property, complaints against individuals, secret, and usually unpleasant, communications were slipped. Inside the house they were opened and read.

Indeed, the whole house retained a something of austerity: an utter lack of modern comfort and refinements. Its immense size, too, made it the more unmanageable. The Contessa has told me how in the Austrian's time they thought nothing of lodging a company of some two hundred men and horses in the house itself.

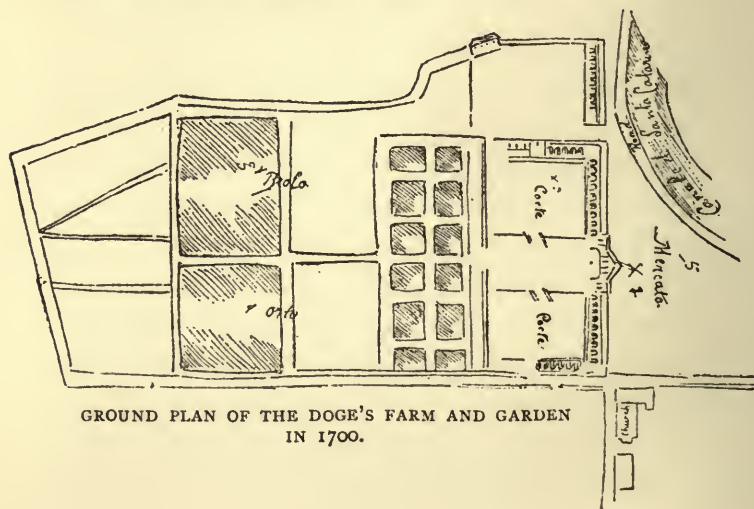
It is natural that the strong English instincts of the new Contessa should have made her shudder at the general sunbaked and unsoftened aspect of this huge farmhouse, or villa, which was to be her home. Yet she saw that there was a beauty in the scene, quite apart from the bareness and breadth of sky, namely, a glorious fertile soil. There were lilies in the ditches, water-flags and rushes, but so few flowers in the fields, and she needed flowers, as English women do, and shade—above all things, shade—then the roses would grow and the birds would come. Also, a beautiful house must hold beautiful things.

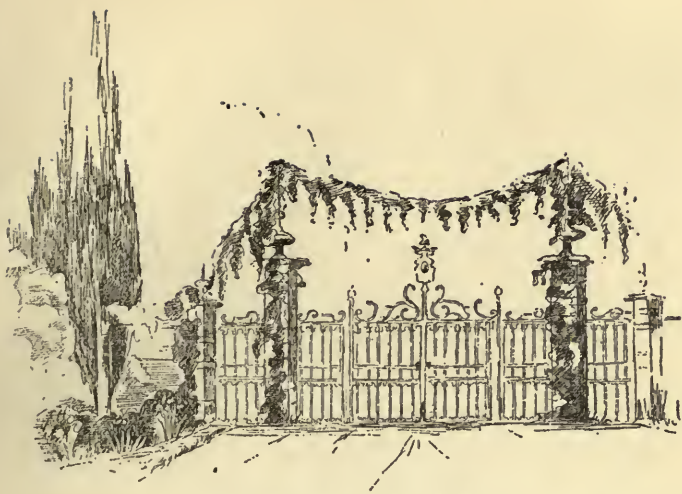
Slowly but surely the thing was begun. Gradually a new and growing world of green and coloured things arose round the bare walls; and within, bit by bit, the rooms became furnished and habitable.

The washing was no longer dried in the upper drawing-rooms, and there the portrait of the Pisani cardinal smiled on the fitter decoration of his walls. Ground on the north side of the house was enclosed, the road turned a little aside to run away from the front door. Pigs can no longer push through the iron gates. Magnolia-trees and bushes of hydrangea bloom freely in this quiet plot of ground. And, strange to tell, a bird has built in the "Bocca delle Denoncie Segrete"—a long-tailed tit has filled the lion's mouth with down. He and his small wife yearly bring their funny tumbling brood out of this mysterious hole, and you hear them twittering in the shade of the large-leaved creeper which now covers the formerly dismal spot.

The box hedges and threshing-floor on the south side were gradually replaced by grass and flower-beds, and a dense circle of trees planted round the whole garden, which covers an extent of some fourteen acres. The trees have grown well. Tall white poplars, chestnuts, and catalpas rear their heads above the pines and lesser shrubs, and little paths and alleys wind among the syringa and tamarisk groves which line the moat. The pear-tree still stands as a centre to the modern garden, its skeleton covered with creepers. And the little white rose runs riot over every bed amongst its finer but less lovely brethren.

It is needless to say that many difficulties came into the way of the ambitious lady who made this garden. The Lombard soil, so rich and excellent for crops and corn, proved itself too thick and heavy for the roots of tenderer flowers. Silver sand—a remnant of granite boulders in an Alpine valley—was scooped from the bed of the Adige, and light leaf-mould brought down from the hills. And now, after almost forty years of patient toil, hampered by the blazing heat of summer suns, by the frosts and floods in winter, hail, blight, and the inexperience of her gardeners, the owner of Vescovana may look forth with no inconsiderable pride upon the results of her hard labour on the untutored plains of great Gromboolia.





GATES OF THE DOGE'S FARM.

CHAPTER III

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

THE visitor to Vescovana must submit to a *régime*. There is no harm—there is often a certain satisfaction in thus submitting—especially if the *régime* be arranged in a manner likely to suit the individual, as it is at Vescovana.

Everything works apparently by clockwork in the Doge's Farm; that is to say, upon first arrival it seems to do so. After a lengthened residence you realise the fact that Gromboolian strings are very hard to pull, and that it needs a considerable intellect to pull them successfully or even at all.

We will say that you get out of your train at Sant' Elena on an afternoon in June, and are shown into some comfortable carriage which is in waiting at the gate, then are at once driven off by a coachman in black, who gives you to understand that he is an automaton, and not to be lightly addressed. But you are, of course, engaged in thinking of a thousand details. "Where is my luggage?" you cry distractedly, as your ticket has been silently taken from you by an old peasant. A wave of the whip from the automaton shows you your portmanteau following in a stone cart, which is driven by the peasant, and dragged by a lively mule with red tassels to his ears. Much relieved, you sink again into your carriage and contemplate the landscape. You feel at first appalled by its monotony. The white road, with a ditch on either side, leads through interminable fields, with now and then a mud hut, some oxen, or a stable. The oxen are beautiful beasts, but you know nothing of their points; the stables appear to you rather low and very much alike. The blue phantoms of the Euganean Hills, rising to the east, alone satisfy your curiosity. You already begin to wish that there were any possibility of getting in amongst them. (On this subject your return journey will rouse very different feelings.) Thus for nearly an hour you are driven along. Then the monotony becomes a little more polished.



DOGE MARIN GRIMANI

[From a portrait in the possession of Countess Pisani]

Trees are planted round the stables, and their oxen look fatter and taller than those around Sant' Elena. There are hedges and red gates before the farms, and the carts which you encounter are painted blue, and have a lion rampant and "Almorò III." printed on their boards. You know nothing, perhaps, of Almorò III., still less of lions rampant; but you become conscious of something individual in the air and in the country. Also the whole populace begins to bow, both women and men uncovering their heads as you pass. You imagine that they bow to you, and try to return the numerous salutations, but in truth they acknowledge the automaton, the horses, and the carriage.

You are within the property of the Pisanis, and you have become a part of its system.

The road winds along the top of the canal past the municipality, the inn, and the houses of the village, and below there is a square full of acacia-trees hiding a long, low building. At this point the coachman raises a brass horn to his lips and blows three distinct blasts, which proceeding naturally astonishes you. At the same minute a bell is rung over the gates—these gates are pulled open, and you are driven round what Miss Austen would probably term a "sweep"—*i.e.*, a gravel road with a bed of roses in its midst. Two motionless men-servants stand upon the steps.

Bewildered by so much unexpected clockwork in the middle of this sleepy plain, you get out. Needless to say, the mule, though lively, has not kept pace with the horses; and you find yourself, as it were, swept off your feet without even the proverbial toothbrush, in this immense house where all seems new. There is almost a chill in the big, cool rooms. All their shutters are closed against the sun, and their air is weighted with the scent of cut flowers. You are at once set down to tea and a variety of thin biscuits peculiar to teas at Ves-covana. Your eyes are attracted to a thousand objects of curiosity and interest within the immense drawing-room. China birds float from the ceiling, huge damask curtains fall from the walls, and an Eastern sense of comfort and joy in colour is spread over the whole, together with a French refinement shown in the cascades of roses falling from elevated glass bowls. Through cracks in the blinds you see a garden full of trees and flowers, into which it is at once your desire to plunge; and, indeed, a sense of having entered a palace of art is strong upon you, and it is with great unwillingness that you embark on other topics, with a hostess whose conversation is as excellent as is the management of her property. No sooner, however, is your tea finished than the carriage is announced, and it is taken for granted that you will accompany your hostess upon her

afternoon employments in the country. The plan sounds attractive. You go. Your tastes have been rightly divined, and whereas your hostess enters at once her closed carriage, you are put into an open victoria and whirled off in pursuit of the brougham.

One visitor from across the Atlantic to Vescovana exclaimed indignantly at the sight of the said brougham and victoria: "This," she cried, "is not at all what I was led to expect, but a car drawn by milk-white oxen—a countess crowned with poppies!" The lady had, I believe, derived her interesting information from a literary compatriot. Nor, though highly coloured, was it without foundation, as will be presently shown (p. 157).

You, however, get into the victoria without such feelings of disappointment, and again make the turn of the sweep. A servant rushes out from behind a bush and closes the gates behind you, and you are then enveloped in the cloud of dust which the carriage in front stirs up. As you whirl along the roads all heads are uncovered, and at every red gate a bowing form is descried, prepared to pull them open. If this form does not appear the automaton at once draws forth his horn and blows a demanding blast. A tremendous amount of conversation follows between the occupant of the brougham and the form, and usually some cowherds and a few women and children cluster round and stare. Your puzzled

brain rightly divines that the form is a bailiff, and that the words concern farm matters. But the little Italian which you command, and which you probably acquired from a study of the classics, is here worse than useless. It merely serves to confuse you further as it enables you to understand the vehemence of the expressions chosen, and not the purely Gromboolian significance which they imply.

A desire seizes upon you to enter one of those farms, having now counted the gates and conversation of four in succession, while you sat outside of them, interested, but chiefly embarrassed, by the many eyes directed at you and your elegant conveyance. You pass through the sleepy village of Stanghella, where the populace turns from regarding the piazza to regard you, and then at last one of the red gates is thrown open, and you drive through a hedge of mulberry-trees and under the arcades of a stable. A circle of farm labourers is immediately formed round the carriages. The door of the brougham is opened, your hostess gets out, and, catching up the long skirts of her gown, she enters the stables. A rather stormy altercation follows, but the sole cause for displeasure which you can note is the fact that a calf has half strangled itself by lying down too far from its halter. To your astonishment the Contessa herself gets into the stall and disengages it. In the meantime the coachman has



Photo by Professor F. Trombini

A GROMBOOLIAN FARM HOUSE

entered the stable bearing with him two rusty biscuit-tins which contain a red substance. Into this go the white hands of your hostess, and you realise that it is salt which she is about to give to her oxen. These great creatures turn their heads; some or them begin to low when they hear her voice. She knows each one individually, and addresses them in the most endearing terms. Over each stall are printed the titles of its two occupants, together with the dates of their birth and the names of their mothers.

You have hitherto kept at a safe distance; you are now called upon to admire: "Come speak to my bull; admire his immense beauty. Admire my angel Magnifico!" and your hostess caresses the enormous creature, stroking his huge neck and pressing her hands upon his lowering forehead. It is true that he idly whisks his heavy tail into your face, but as you have become part of a system you follow blindly, and are surprised to find that a bull is a very soft and amiable creature, charming to caress. Indeed, from this moment you acquire a love and taste for these heroes and heroines of Vescovana which you could never have foreseen as possible.

A woman has arrived from a neighbouring cottage with a basin of water and a clean towel. She stands as though just wound up at the open door. The

padrona washes her hands in the basin and passes back into her carriage. The *cortège* moves off; the bailiff and the "guardians," who, by the by, appear to be quite unabashed by the reprimands they have received, bowing along by the brougham windows to the last; the gates are closed, and you yourself being by this time tuned to a mood of absolute submission, begin to seek for beauty in the ditches, and repose in a stupid indifference. After this you go into two or three more farms, and are surprised to find precisely the same scenes re-enacted in each. At eight you return to the house. The horn is blown, the bell rung. You pray for a minute's rest. But no. A sweet air of flowers is wafted in from the garden which innumerable peasant girls are watering. Another bell rings: "Ah! it has only just rung—the dinner bell," says your indefatigable hostess; "there is just time to look at Crispin de Pass and the Mockery." You are told to abandon your ordinary hat and to place on your head some strange straw device of which there are piles in the hall. Then out you go.

You are walked slowly over gravel paths; you are pushed into an arbour and told that its name is the "Blue Devils," in which case you think it a very suitable resting-place. But you are hastily dragged out again to admire the beauties of a freshly-mapped parterre full of terra-cotta jars and scarlet geraniums.

This you are informed is "Crispin de Pass"; then on you tread to another arbour, which you are told is "Miss Somebody's Bower." Innumerable monuments to "E," "B," and "L" confront you, and finally a pyramid of stones, surmounted by a sign-post bearing the word "Mockery," further confounds you; whilst beyond this rise the "Walls of Jericho" and the "Temple of Baal." A gardener follows in your train. He is commanded to give a snip here, to tie a string there, to pull up a rose-tree, and plant perhaps a daisy in exchange. The Ave Maria comes over the trees from the church, and a misty golden light floods the whole land.

Who and what was Crispin de Pass? Swiss pumps, bare bowers, blue devils, and a mockery—what are these things to you? You merely see around you a southern garden full of roses which fascinate your northern eye. The size and scent of the magnolias charm you, and the delicious lavishness of sweet-pea hedges. The sleepy moat, overgrown with water-lilies and pink tamarisk, delights you, for here a gondola lies hidden under syringa-trees; the singing of the birds, the groves of poplar and of pine, and the little arbour on a hill all sweetly scented with honeysuckle, where a red terra-cotta Madonna has her shrine—these things entrance you more than the botanical specimens which have cost so much thought and care.

Physically and mentally "fagged" by all the novelty, you crawl into the house and stumble into evening clothes. You find your things spread



SHRINE OF THE RED MADONNA.

neatly out in an ideal bedroom. Mirrors confront you at every turn, magnificent roses crowd your dressing-table, together with a thousand knick-knacks; your windows open on a balcony full of

flowering oleander, and the nightingales have begun to sing like mad. When dressed you go into the drawing-room, in something of a hurry; for having been informed that the dinner is at eight, you are shocked to hear the village clock strike nine.

As you pass through the door into the drawing-room, a form rises from a table in the background and confronts you in the twilight. It is A. who will lead you later to the cities of the hills; and read you Leopardi, Virgil, Dante, Homer.

The Contessa now appears from some side door, and though the night is hot, she wears a long lamb's wool cloak over her evening gown. Her hair is pinned together, as it seems to you, with doges' caps made of long pearls and diamonds. But instead of a ducal phrase, you are greeted by a message from the stable: "A calf has just been born at the Dieci," she says, holding out some bailiff's grimy paper. "You must give it your name. Is it not a true honour to have one of my beautiful *bovi* called after you?"

Being now part of the "system," you realise what you might not have done before, that in giving your name to a cow you are receiving, and by no means conferring, a favour. Your name, and those of your more celebrated ancestors, are now raked over the coals of the Contessa's criticism. The

most beautiful is selected, or that which has won most honour, and it is dictated to A., who, at a later hour, will print it on one of those boards which you noticed in the stables. You are now at last marshalled off to dinner. You enter an immense square dining-room, which is lighted solely by clusters of small fairy lights scattered through the pink heaps of roses on the tablecloth, or amongst the syringa branches falling from baskets on the wall. These walls are covered with frescoes representing trees and birds, so faintly and delicately done you almost feel yourself once more out in the open air.

The meal, though almost endless, is accompanied by a conversation so brilliant and amusing that you are spared the dismal task of noting that with such a dish at the beginning there is sure to be an unwelcome number to follow. It were difficult to describe the conversation of the Doge's Farm. It is almost universal—it flies from the naming of a calf, to the loves of Cleopatra; the ploughing of a field, to the "Inferno" of Dante; the brodering of a napkin, to the policy of Gladstone or the sonnets of Michelangelo. A. gives his opinion on most subjects, and you cannot help remarking that this opinion is unfailingly the exact opposite of that expressed by every one else.

The servants come and go noiselessly across the

heavy carpets. They bring you plates or strange designs ; they take them and replace them with others. Here you partake of a jellied swan, there of an eastern gourd.

But if the servants are silent, the same cannot be said of the cats, which keep a screaming guard around the table. They are all black, all thin, and tall, and their eyes have a particularly yellow look in that dimly-lighted room. If one is left outside the window, the panes are vehemently rattled by her gentle paws, and these demands to enter are immediately complied with by a silent footman. They jump on the sideboard, and there devour any morsel left upon the plates ; they crunch the chicken bones ; they pounce upon the half-gnawed stalks of your asparagus. Their mistress knows them each by name : "The King of the Moors," "Nerina," "Straniera," and a host of others, whose titles and pedigree you may perhaps in time acquire also. It is further the pleasure of these fascinating beasts—and none of their pleasures are for an instant checked, as the Empress Frederick found when Nerina jumped upon her knee and seized the salmon from her plate at dinner—it is their pleasure then to call your attention to their appetite by standing on their hind legs and scratching their peculiarly pointed claws up and down your knees. Woe to the light lace dress, the cleanly muslin, or

the shining cloth. A dog who answers to different names at different seasons of the year, but which at your season is called "Tirindoo," wages a political war with the cats. Aware that numbers are against her, it is Tirindoo's policy to work upon one's pity, and to raise a fuller voice, and one of agony as though attacked, above those screaming ones of her enemies. Thus, to a discussion on the Sonnets of Michelangelo or the "Débacle" of Zola, is added a chorus of yelps and yawls peculiar to the table of Vescovana; whilst in the further distance of a hidden pantry a crowd of doves send forth a gentle but persistent cooing. And from the garden, owls and nightingales join in the praise of night.

You wash your fingers with warm water and a lemon, then ladies and gentlemen return arm-in-arm up the steep stairs to the drawing-room. Here the windows are tightly closed, though the night is extremely hot. One shutter stands half ajar, and lets through the heavy scent of vine flowers on the pergola which well-nigh sickens you by its sweetness. Then you remember that fever is bred in that air as surely as the flower of the vines. The vast hall, stuffed with objects, which it is your desire to contemplate, is so dimly lighted by shaded lamps that you submit to an armchair and a state of semi-lethargy, through which you begin to see

nothing but doges' caps embroidered on every object in a series of golden threads.

A. retires to his table in the background, where he spends his time between a breviary and the inscription of your name upon a board ; the finishing of accounts, and some words on Dante. He then, as it seems, falls asleep.

You are sorry when bedtime comes, as the conversation has been strangely new and pleasing. You find in your room an elaborate apparatus for making your own lemonade, and several pastilles placed on a piece of brick to burn against mosquitoes. Your shutters are heavily barred, but you have yet the English energy to wrench them open and snuff up that warm delicious air of an Italian night. Then you determine to close the windows, but at least to have the moonlight enter your room if not the air. You now realise that you are honestly tired, and pray devoutly for a well-earned sleep, into which you immediately fall.

But what is this noise—this hurrying to and fro, these screeching sounds, this glaring light, this deadly scent?—to all which things you suddenly awaken at a later hour. Up and down go a hundred scurrying feet above your head, round and round some heavy loads are thrown and dragged, while your head is burdened with the unbearable combination of lavender and pastilles.

You rush to the window to bar at least the shutters against a moon which in future you will leave to lovers to admire, and against the songs of nightingales which poets may praise in songs you'll never read. You tear open your door to admit some shadow of a draught from the ghostliest of passages, and burying your head once more in the embroidered sheets, you attempt to forget those indescribable noises which ramp about the upper stories of a doge's farm.

Some one comes to open your shutters. Another servant follows a little later with your breakfast. You feel that all the clocks are well wound up, and that you yourself must begin to tick contentedly. A delicious air, a bath of sunlight full of the songs of morning birds, and the scent of flowers, streams through your window. A silver tray, a coffee-pot, a cup, a jar of milk, some biscuits, and a piece of toast—these things compose your morning meal, with a due seasoning of doges' caps. You take it when and where you will—in your room, or out on your marble balcony amongst the oleanders.

The quiet voices of other guests are speaking under the pergola. "Did you hear the rats?" says one. "It is rather a bore having the granaries just over the bedrooms." "And the nightingales," answers another, who is a very cheerful guest;

“what a noise they do kick up in this place! But one soon gets accustomed to them, and to the rats too, for that matter.”

The voices disappear under the arcades, where in a short time you join them, to visit those far-famed Pisani granaries which produced the cause of your night terrors.

You now receive a message from the Contessa that a servant will show you over the granaries or any part of the house you may wish to see. You are accordingly marshalled through every corner and cranny by a domestic, who bears a perfect burden of keys, and solemnly unlocks the doors. These keys have large wooden labels which flop and clank. The cheerful guest who accompanies you tells you that the actual length of the house of Vescovana exceeds that of the piazza of San Marco at Venice. You are first shown through all the linen cupboards, and if you have an economical mind it will surprise you to hear that your sheets and towels are washed at Mestre and ironed in Milan, and that the doges' caps are embroidered in the convents of France. You are then taken up narrow staircases and into vast tracts of granary. The countless windows are opened by the domestic, letting in a warm light through curtains of wistaria and of ivy. As you probably know nothing of the merits of beans and

maize, and care still less, you retain of these granaries but a very dim impression, only, maybe, a recollection of hundreds of square feet of grain spread on their floors; but this lesson in their geography will enable you to follow out more precisely the nightly orgies above your bedroom.

From the granaries you descend to the *barchesse*: these are immense arcades where all the farm machines, sacks, seats, &c., are housed and guarded by a herd of Maremma sheep-dogs. Here, too, are innumerable beehives looking out upon parterres of lavender. The melancholy domestic will tell you that his mistress rarely eats the honey of her bees, though she spares no money in maintaining them. She likes to think that her darlings do not starve.

You now proceed to the kitchens. There a charming young *chef* and two most lovely kitchen-maids do the honours. Then into the stables, and here the Oracle (such is the nickname of the coachman) will gladly hector over you as long as you care to stay. You are surprised to see two carriages being got ready at this early hour of the day. Vines shadow all the stable walls, and swallows pass in and out of the blue curtains across the door. You pass on into the kitchen-garden—honeysuckle and tea-roses climb and battle about its walls. Suddenly you are startled by the sound of a bell.

The cheerful guest remembers that you are to lunch at eleven. Off you dash over the length of the Piazza di San Marco, and finding your breakfast things in your room, realise how unprepared you are for lunch. It is scarcely eleven. You go downstairs and wait beneath the pergola, as you are told that the Contessa is still in the garden. There are few places quite as hot, or as fascinating, as this pergola on a summer's day. The Contessa now emerges from "Crispin de Pass," and you all go in to lunch. Strange brown saucepans with eggs are presented to you, potatoes, and Turkish rice. A crunching on the gravel announces the carriage. "You are ready, of course," says the Contessa. You realise that an early meal means an early start. You rush upstairs and seize your hat and sketch-book.

"Where are we going to be sent to?" says the cheerful guest, standing in the drawing-room.

"To Praglia. You ought to see Praglia."

"What is Praglia?" you ask mechanically.

"A convent—a beautiful place. It is only twenty miles from here. You will be back in good time for dinner. I expect you at seven. Go—go—have pleasure."

Your hostess lies down upon a cool divan and her guests pass out into the carriage and the scorching midday heat.

A. is already established as guide in the carriage,

silent and a bit alarming, but inwardly rejoicing. The gates are opened by the bush-menial, who afterwards shuts them. The dust flies up, and off you go upon one of those interminable drives which are at once the hope and the despair of visitors to Vescovana.

You pass through a country which has not yet revealed its charm to you. Its monotony alone is apparent to your eyes. The heat is intense. A. puts a large blue cotton handkerchief over his wideawake and falls asleep, or feigns to do so, in his corner. He wakes occasionally to abuse the coachman, to frown at a parishioner, to point out a herd of geese, which it is his joke to call "roba Inglese." He also insists upon having the carriage closed when you approach a town. At last you get into the Euganean Hills, a delicious region full of poems and romance—far sweeter and more lovely than anything you could have hoped to see. Is it the monotony of the plain which has endeared them to you suddenly, and made their watercourses, their lanes, their meadows, and their bushy banks so soothing and so grateful to your eyes? Certain it is you will not be allowed to catch anything but fleeting visions of their beauties. The horses, which are wound up even more mechanically than other things within the Doge's Farm, jog on at a hopeless trot. Sometimes they stop mechanically to breathe.



Photo by Professor F. Trombini

A GARDEN WALL AT ESTE IN THE EUGANEAN HILLS

Clumps of cypress-trees, towering from grass-grown paths above some ruined convent, excite your imagination. A villa, a little lake, a bosco ; a lizard on a mossy stone, a grove of flowering acacia, a sleepy shrine—things you desire to touch, to feel, to see—all are passed by, and towards 3 p.m. you come to Praglia. The charms of that great uninhabited building, its glory and its desolation, seize hold of you. Gladly would you linger in its cloisters, to pluck the pink hybiscus, to stretch for maidenhair down mouldering marble wells where fig-trees grow between the stones. And you could sit for hours on the window-ledges of those quiet cells, looking across the vineyards to the plain, feeling the sea beyond, and watching the progress of the summer clouds across the sky.

But you must go. You may not even linger before the radiant countenance of Montagna's Madonna and St. John, or trace the patterns on the terra-cotta friezes. Back, back from all this quiet splendour of old monks within enchanted halls ; you, as they did, must forsake it, and turn back across the baking plain.

"The Contessa," says A., "dines at seven."

Towards sunset sweet scents arise from the fields, and lovely golden lights play over and through the entire land. "Fever," murmurs A. several times in succession. You cannot ignore his hints, though

you disbelieve in their prophetic insight. Once more you submit. The carriage is shut, the window closed. You sink into a lethargy from which not even a June sunset can arouse you; and at about eight a bell is rung, and you realise that the forty miles have been completed. The Contessa comes down to meet you beautifully attired.

"Make haste, make haste!" she cries. "Dinner is ready."

You dust, you dress, you descend. There are the roses, there the fairy-lights; and thus your second day is finished upon the Doge's Farm.

Rats may racket above your head, and nightingales may make night hideous out in the garden. You hear them not. You sleep the sleep of absolute lassitude and submission.



CHURCH AND HOUSE OF VESCOVANA, SEEN FROM THE CANAL.



THE TOMB OF PETRARCH AT ARQUÀ



MULBERRY.

CHAPTER IV

SECOND THOUGHTS

THE first impressions modify. They assume character and individual interests within a very few days. Farms, roads, and fields gain new and living beauties. The house becomes a comfortable home wherein to read and write at ease during the morning hours. The farms, their bailiffs, and their oxen all assume real and living characters. The automaton turns out to be an oracle who almost rules the ruler. The brougham

is lightly termed the Calais-Douvre, owing to its swinging and superior movement over the channels of Gromboolia. The horn and bell are found necessities with servants who incline to morning as well as afternoon siestas. The Mockery contains plenty of reality : small green frogs, unchecked weeds, and rhubarb, as well as rare and tenderly nurtured plants. The impassioned voices of mistress and of men are often raised about the mending of a cart-wheel, the cutting of a ditch. The groans of A. have no connection with heretical beliefs of guests. They rise more likely from a toothache, or the characteristics of some mediæval saint. And the long drives into the hills, which wearied you at the time, will assume in memory the charm of dreams.

Indeed, these drives form by themselves an immense attraction to Vescovana. It is true that the Doge's Farm is built just a few miles too far away from the feet of the Euganeans ; but when this distance has been covered, what joy awaits the eager tourist ! He will find there a whole set of little cities. Each has a tempestuous past written in its archives, and a small piazza, arcaded streets, a church, a ruined castle. There is Monselice, with its seven holy chapels, climbing between cypress-trees up the steep hillside. And here is Este, with its villa which Byron hired and lent to Shelley ; the remains of



PETRARCH'S HOUSE AT ARQUÀ

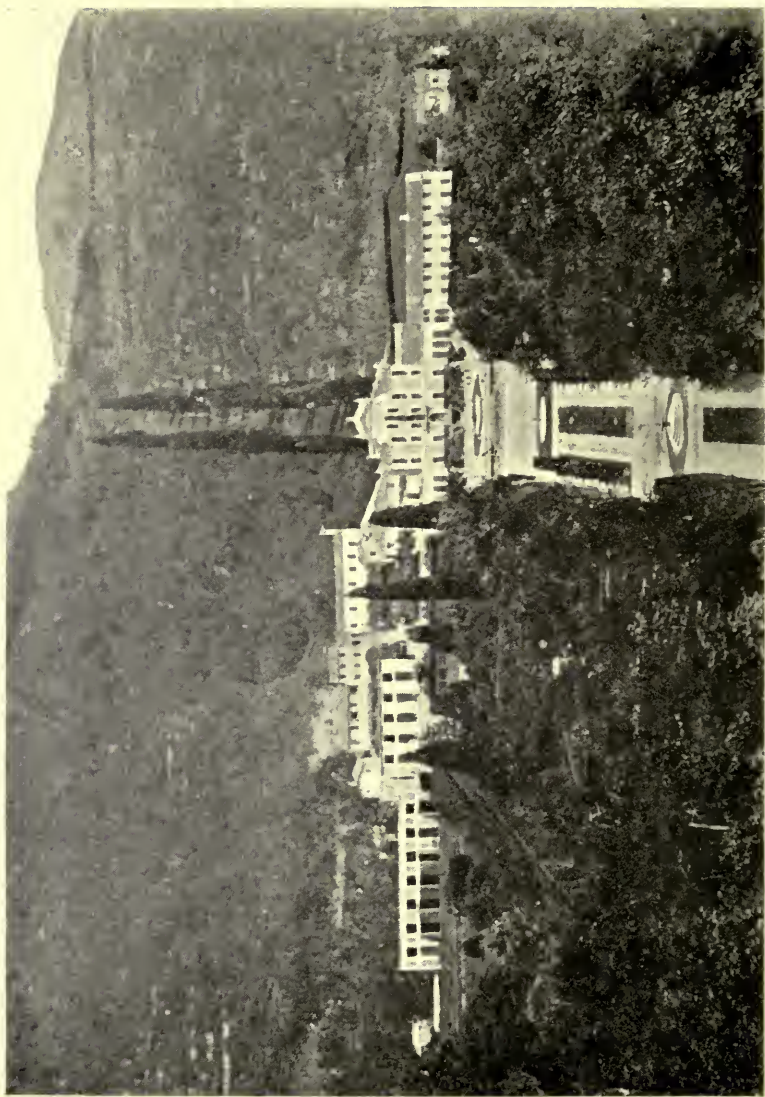
its immense castle, now used for the cultivation of vines and the weekly cattle-market; and the museum full of a strange nation's tombs. Battaglia next, with its famous baths, and the villa of Cattaia, dear to the lover of armour. Then Praglia, Teolo, Val San Zibio, and last, but not least, Arquà.

Petrarch lived his last years and was buried in Arquà. But even if this had not been a fact, one still must have felt the intense charm of this small sleepy hill-town. I saw it last one day in June, with an impassioned Southerner, who regarded the expedition as almost a sacred pilgrimage. Pomegranate hedges mixed with privet came bursting over the walls, and above were "banks whereon the wild thyme grows." We climbed up the steep path leading to the poet's house, and left the village below us—a very jewel of a place—with brown tiles on its roofs, and all its shutters closed against the first warm kiss of June. The joujoub-tree grows in great abundance there at Arquà: its leaf is of a peculiarly fresh and vivid green, and when it casts its boughs across a whitewashed wall, one's eyes are almost dazzled by the shining vivid texture. The day was very hot, and the mists upon the plain obscured the vast view over Lombardy which I had known here in autumn. Fields and trees melted into the heated air like a blue sea, from which church

towers and houses emerged as sails upon its bosom. Up and down that steep and pebbly road the women went with pails. There seems to be more water at Arquà than in all the district of the Euganean Hills.

At last we reached the house of Petrarch. It stands high on the hill—a small brown house with a loggia and a garden, big iron balconies, and rooms all open to the air—a fit abode for any poet, and for all sweet souls to sing from. What if it were not his house, or if, as the *custode*, with a smiling cynicism, said to me in answer to my meaningless inquiry concerning the abode of Laura, “*Laura non fu mai*”? This house remains the heart’s ideal of a poet’s home. We climbed the loggia stairs and entered the cool rooms. From the north and from the south the breezes freely passed and stayed to play across the poet’s table, and linger round the walls where Petrarch wanders still, in fresco, through golden paths and sunny meadows, there to meet with Laura.

The tomb stands on the piazza before the church. It is a solid block of crimson Verona marble upheld by four pillars, simply cut, and on the top is the head of the poet cast in bronze and green with winter rains. This tomb has the charm of great strength and simplicity. Though it has stood there in the open air for five hundred years and more, it



VAL SAN ZIBIO IN THE EUGANEAN HILLS

is not scarred, and there seems no occasion to enclose it with the iron paling which somewhat mars its outline.

Some years ago Petrarch's tomb was opened at Arquà, and it was found that bees had made their honeycomb upon the poet's heart. This fact was related to Countess Pisani by an eye-witness, so we may trust its veracity, strangely poetical and unreal as it may seem to us.

I have described the interest of Arquà at length, as, if time be limited, it is the place most worthy of a visit in the Euganean Hills. Still all these places have a personal charm, which is intensified after a residence in, or a long drive across the plain. And dearer to me than Arquà are the gardens of Val San Zibio. This is a fairy plot of ground. A half-circle of hills surrounds it. Once the architect of the Versailles gardens came to the Euganeans. He left behind him a miniature Versailles—a little city of hornbeam and of box cut into labyrinths and streets, with chestnut-trees for palaces, and a wonderful display of marble tanks and fountains.

To describe one Lombard road were to describe all. But as one nears the feet of the hills, a more varied vegetation, bred on mountain soil, creeps down into the cultivated fields, and adds colour or height to their familiar plants. The natural impulse of these roads is to run straight. But the

small properties of our times enforce small angles and the consequent break of Romanesque monotony. The roads are always admirably kept, and as they have to be made with great difficulty, owing to the want of stone in the neighbourhood, they are very solid and firm when once completed. They are white and smooth, and your carriage rolls along them as though it were upon a city street laid down with wood. On either side there is usually a deep ditch, which in spring and autumn is filled with water, and is always lined with grass and rushes. Here, too, you will find loosestrife, forget-me-not, flags, and every sort of water-weed ; and over the more shaded ditches the duck-weed grows so thick you almost think it land, till a flock of new-fledged ducks pushes in amongst it, and ruffles the surface by a sudden charge of tiny bills. They are a pleasing break in the monotony of the road-landscape, these occasional families of little birds ! They like to lie along the grassy paths—a flattened line of golden fluff, which may remain quiet as you pass, or else get up with one consent, and speed away before the carriage wheels. Turkeys and guinea-fowl are produced in thousands for exportation all over this country.

But I would have no one believe that drives into the hills offer the sole entertainment to visitors at the Doge's Farm. There are interests at its own



BACK OF THE CHURCH AT VESCOVANA.

doors just as great as these, if looked at in the proper light. Few things could be discovered in any country more impressive than the Lombard harvest, and in no corner of that country can it be seen to better advantage than in Gromboolia—properly the Bassa Padovana—where the soil is particularly rich, and has been cultivated for centuries. This sight it was my privilege to see. Indeed, I stayed at the Doge's Farm for over eight weeks one summer, and rarely during that time did I ever drive outside the property of the Pisanis—an area of some three thousand acres. During that time the "system" which I have described above was broken through.

In the evening, after dinner, when the house was not yet quite shut up, I left the growing ghost of fever to the mind of A. There are window-ledges on the north side of the hall in the Doge's Farm. These ledges are more than three feet broad, and the heat of the sunset lingers in their stones far into the night. I could creep through the sash windows, for the air was not absolutely forbidden at that hour, and sit outside, looking into the west and hearing the others talk within. Their familiar voices only increased the sense of mystery in all the country round. The stars came out, one by one, in the sky over the acacia-trees. They seemed strangely red, and by their light the clematis, which grew along the wall, deepened to dull purple.

A sort of throb pulsed through the air, in the owl-light ; a laugh of girls on a far-away road, the sound of a young man's singing, of birds not gone to sleep, and the rumble of trains miles off upon the plain.

The day lingered long in Lombardy at that season, fluttering and shaking through the sky ; and this hour, so remarkable in the South, has for me a peculiar charm. The night may be more glorious—calmer and completer ; but twilight is the hot-bed for romance and fiction, a thing which “fascinates and is intolerable”—a time when restless souls, of youth, at least, go mad.

Sometimes I went into the garden then. The dews had not yet fallen, and the big moths hovered, warm and fluffy, among the flowers which open only to the night. The geraniums burnt a sullen red, the roses were obscured, and the magnolia buds lay sleeping white against their leaves. Most flowers in the garden swooned. But the ox-eye daisies shone like stars among the grass—thousands and thousands of them, vying for brilliancy with the fire-flies. And that was the hour for the evening primrose. It blossomed suddenly, like shaded lamps, all through the borders and the dusky alleys of the garden. I picked great bunches of this flower—their petals were so cool and fresh—their pollen scent divine. There was a peculiar fascination in gathering these,

and the daisies together—the two most luminous flowers of the garden, which in the day would be passed by. For I confess that it was ghostly in the garden at twilight, and that my footsteps were hurried. They seemed dogged by invisible beings whom I could not discern—whom I hastened to flee from. I grabbed the flowers, and I regained the house with no inconsiderable feeling of relief! But the dews of night deepened my delight in the verses of Leopardi or of Dante, which I read with A.

My morning walks were an unmitigated pleasure. I rose at early hours, and went into the garden when it was yet heavy with dew. How glorious were the yellow roses after sleep! The magnolia flowers were limp with slumber, their petals fell apart, letting the heavy fragrance go up to meet the sun, and the spirea looked whiter in the grass. The feathered sprays of tamarisk-trees shivered and sprang back as the dewdrops which had held them fell away and dissolved with the waters of the moat. The tree-frogs basked on the lily-leaves. The nightingales were silent. I saw the little brown bird, whose magnificent songs had thrilled the night, running along like other birds to breakfast under the violet leaves, or find a beetle in syringa hedges. But the bushes of evening primrose, so piled with bloom in the evening, were bare. Their blossoms had vanished with the stars.

Another great, though half-forbidden, attraction in Vescovana is the ascent of its campanile, or bell-tower. When once the rickety, break-neck stairs have been ascended, and the ropes and the clock-work safely evaded, there can be no airier nor more pleasing resting-place in all Gromboolia than this little platform under the bells. Seen from up there, Lombardy is grand, and its immensity is partly realised. After a great storm it was a joy to climb the tower and look upon the fresh-washed plain, with the tremendous clouds pouring black sheets of rain on the horizon. Also on summer mornings, when warm mists lingered round the hills, and the sunlight streamed across the waving corn, the place was very charming.

A., however, entertained a particular aversion to the performance by other people of a thing he himself could by no means accomplish. He had his revenge. I shall not all my life forget the horror and vexation of a quarter of an hour passed late one evening in the campanile of the village church. The day had been tempestuous. Towards dinner-time the clouds lifted. An immense desire to breathe the air and see the world in the space of ten minutes seized upon my friend and me. Quite oblivious of any possible danger, we ran out from the house, where we had suddenly grown weary of exchanging our views on

the universe, dashed across the piazza, and were soon at the top of the bell-tower. The pageant of storm which met our eyes was so gorgeous that we were lost in the contemplation of its many splendours. Also the oppression which had hung about the Doge's Farm for days had vanished. The air was washed by rain ; we breathed it cold, and clear, and clean. Huge shadows lay over the chess-board at our feet. The men were out, pulling the stacks about in the Dieci. The blood of sunset struggled forth—red and boiling—from a bank of thunder in the west. In the east an immense rainbow spanned the earth and sky. What wonder that we should ignore the passing of the hours ! Suddenly and surely we were reminded of them by the clash of the clock at our backs, and the clanging dinner-bell in the villa. A horrible stampede and scuttle down the wooden ladders succeeded. The door was locked.

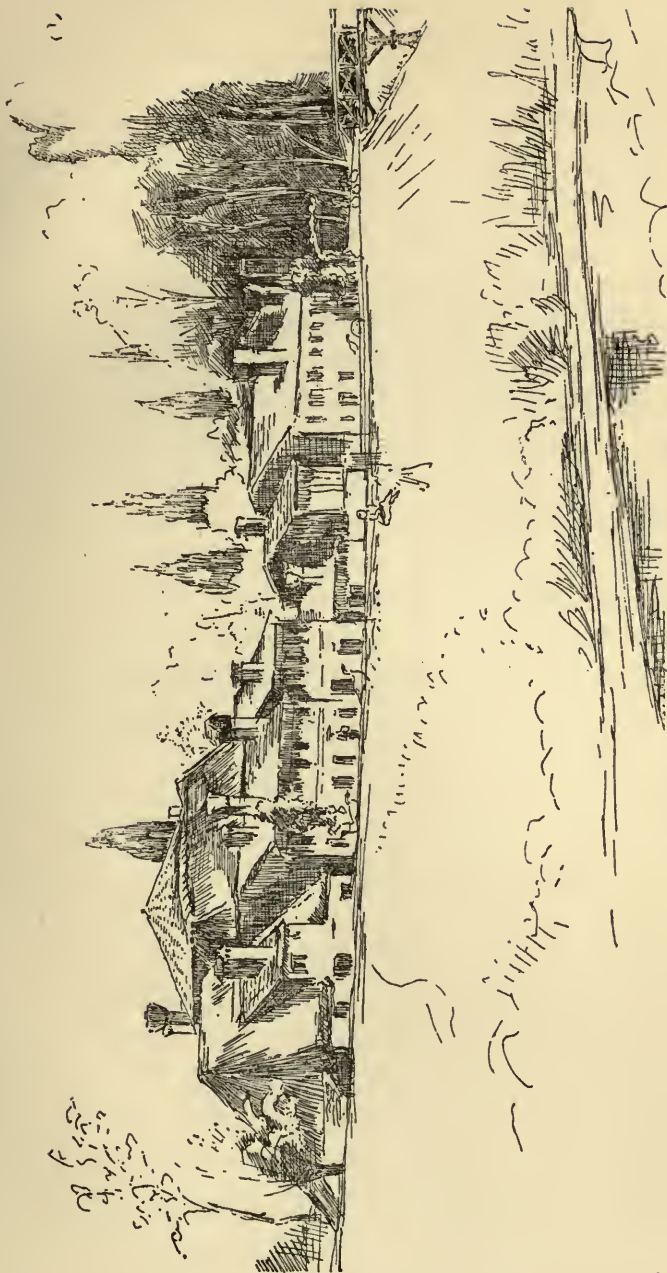
The rest may be imagined. I have never forgiven A. But he has forgiven me, for he, like other mortals, has a vast appreciation of his own wit.

Besides these forms of exercise and excitement, I sometimes took a tramp—such as my nation considers necessary—through the fields. I was always accompanied by the dogs of the Doge's Farm, five in number. We enjoyed ourselves extremely. They went through the solemn farce of hunting hares,

where it is certain none existed, and I of encouraging them in their folly. These walks were decidedly monotonous, and I could never become accustomed to the snakes. But the charm of monotony in nature is sometimes an hypnotic one. Corn-flowers and poppies, poppies and corn-flowers; wheat and willows, willows and wheat. There was nothing else by the wayside. Yet these things sufficed, and it was always with regret that I and the dogs turned home.

Perhaps the most marked change in the "system" was shown in the order of afternoon drives, for the victoria was exchanged for a light country gig, in which I drove myself when and where I would, across uncultivated fields, along the sandy paths by the canals, and above the banks of Adige—which last, in their magnificence of breadth and sweep, rival a Paris boulevard. These drives are stamped upon my brain in a manner never to be effaced—long hours of the afternoon or evening—passed in the heart of that country unknown to any tourist. It was then that I fully realised the melancholy charm of Gromboolia, that I acquired a love and admiration both for the land and for the people. The one went back to Nature, the other showed itself human, and the Bompard way of explaining things was proved to be but a pleasing folly.

I found that no one night or evening was ever



VILLAGE OF VESCOVANA, FROM THE CANAL.

really like another, even in the monotony of cloudless summer days. Amongst my notes I have the description of one which is typical and true, and I give it here. I saw so many, and wished that others could share with me the unexampled beauty of that immensity of sky and plain—a vast stage with a passing pageant of European grandeur spread nightly forth, while only one solitary foreign spectator was there to mark the splendour of its drop-scenes, its foot-lights, and its inimitable ballet.

“To-night we drove out from the Fontana (one of the Pisani farms) late in the sunset. We had been called in to visit a sick ox. The administration of Epsom salts forced down this huge patient’s throat through a beer-bottle held by the Oracle, with the assistance of Gromboolian cowherds, proved a long business. The stable was hot, the scene had lost the charm of novelty. What joy, then, to drive out into the air! We passed through the lane, where willows and acacia cast a dense shadow, and out over the wooden bridge which has no parapet, till we came to the road winding along the high banks of the Gorzone Canal. This is a delicious, quiet place. The sand there lies about six inches deep, and it is very soft to drive upon. Small yellow water-lilies reared their heads from out the water, which already had sunk low, and dwindled from a river into a morass. On the banks grew bushes of

the lilac vetch, with a mist of dust about its lower leaves, and the cool grey blossoms very sweet to look at. Here, too, were St. John's wort, white dwarf elder, and scarce budding mulleins.

"All the centre of our sky was shadowed by an immense dark cloud. But underneath it the furnace of the low summer sun burnt hotly, and mighty shafts of fire streamed through upon the green and dusky world, gilding its every edge with a warm halo, like that of some fair woman's hair. The distant Euganeans were green and blue at first, till the red fingers of the dying sun caressed them. Then they turned to crimson; and above the golden stubble fields we saw the towers of Monselice, and the rows of cypress over Este emerging like thin red ghosts against the pallid green. There was a pile of darker clouds towards the east, and always above our heads the big cloud-curtain grew thicker and blacker till its body seemed to encompass all but the ends of the sky, where those lines of intensest light pierced through, flooding the whole low land.

"Small clumps of dwarfish trees, beds of high marsh rushes, with only here and there the pinnacled thatch of some mud hut to break the interminable sweep of country. Then we left the bank of the canal, to plunge into more fertile fields, and wound over soft brown earthy roads between high hedges

of Indian corn and wheat. In one place we came across some cottages, which were buried to their chimney-pots in the streaming ribands of maize. Thin blue smoke rose out of the tasselled bloom, cutting the line of light on the horizon. Above the thunder-clouds grew dark and terrible.

"Every one was going home. The day's work was done. The women bore large bundles of corn upon their heads and shoulders, the men slouched idly by.

"The church of Vescovana stood up black against the twilight—a thin dark object, painted as it were with a fine brush and Indian ink. From its campanile there rose and fell the sound of the Ave Maria."



SILKWORM.

CHAPTER V

MAY WANDERINGS

IT was in the middle of May, 1892, that we returned to Vescovana. Leaving the Roman Campagna all ablaze with poppies, and the vineyards full of baby grapes upon the smiling hills of Tuscany, we crossed the Apennines and came out upon the Lombard plain. No one, it is certain, can see the last of that green Arno valley, bejewelled with white cities and dark cypress-trees, without some pulling at his heart-strings. Mine pulled hard enough, and I was therefore startled at my own unchanged appreciation of the flat and monotonous fields which now surrounded us.

It is quite certain, however, that I *was* glad to return to them on that May evening, although but some few days back we had lingered in the star-

light on the steps of Trevi's fountain, and watched the moon rise over Florence.

I paid the Doge's Farm but a very short visit on this occasion, then went straight on to Venice with my father. The journey from Vescovana to Venice was of a decidedly strange sort. I find a letter written about it at the time, and as its contents show pretty thoroughly what travelling in Gromboolia may be like, I cannot refrain from quoting parts of it here.

“VENICE, *May*, 1892.

“DEAREST L.,—We have just arrived—Father, Angelo, and I—in the train and steamer from Padua, and I seize this first moment of repose in which to write to you. Since last I wrote we have lived last days at Rome, seen Florence, Vescovana, and Teolo—all this in the space of one week. Ponder the fact and admit that my silence is well accounted for. Now that I do write I have no notion of where to begin my rhapsodies, for they will be many. Perhaps the last has been the best. Caterpillars and an apocalyptic horse are easier described than Roman temples.

“When we left Rome we went straight to Florence, and enjoyed all the joys of a visit to Poggio Gherardo, which house, as I have often told you, is one of the most fascinating of all Italian villas. Birds, beasts, and orchids, everything to please one in

the outside surroundings, and all the charm of Tuscan landscape added on, with delightful society, a bosco and a guitar. No one can sing and play *Stornelli* like Mrs. Ross, that is certain. She has got hold of the spirit of the people, and there is southern passion which moves one strangely, in her eyes and in her songs. Sir James Lacaita was staying in Florence. He brought two of his Taranto servants up to Poggio one afternoon; and they, and every one else, danced the *pizzica*. It is an extraordinary sort of dance. I have its music yet in my head. In the evening L. K. and I tried to strip the garden of roses. But in vain. Florentine roses have no end. The pink cascade flowed on unbroken from the villa to the valley of the Arno. We stayed in Florence only three nights, thence went on to Vescovana. Arriving in that place late at night, we were bamboozled into a thousand follies. We were forced to drag our weary limbs upon the balcony, and peering into the almost absolute darkness with dusty eyes, to declare we saw marvels in the garden, where, as a fact, nothing was visible save fire-flies. In the morning, however, miracles were disclosed—innumerable mockeries met our eyes. (Mr. Blomfield, by the by, ought to feel flattered, for his book has made havoc in a Lombard plot of ground.) Half of the old field has been turned into a 'formal garden,' and christened Crispin de

Pass. It is all plotted out with grass, and gravel paths, and flower-beds. Gates, balustrades, and sweet-pea hedges enclose it. Every one says this arrangement is right, that it gives what was needed to the architecture of the house. But for my part I loved the old way well, and would never have had it thus scratched and blotched over. However, it is splendidly done, and in a year or two it will be overgrown. Biscoccia has run riot with his nasturtium seeds. This plant covers a multitude of sins. I do not see why one should resent it. A. was in a sad mood, which he declared found its origin in a toothache. Also his *passero solitario* has died very suddenly, and the parrot we gave him, having bitten him through the nose, is feared. All questions put to him are answered by a bow. Moreover, he is writing a book.

“We had a splendid time, though it was short. We went for some long drives, and enjoyed ourselves in house and garden. The country has never, perhaps, looked as beautiful as after the heavy rains of this spring. The floods were still out, and bad in places, and K. and I were rewarded for the *solito* tramp towards the Adige by the vision of hundreds of lilies shining in the exact centre of ditches some twelve feet broad! So we were forced to return empty-handed. We saw the greatest number of water-snakes it has ever been my luck (or the reverse)

to witness. The water in places seemed full of them. They put the idea of paddling after water-lilies quite out of the question. Father joined us the second day, and he and I and Angelo left Vescovana and came on here *viâ* Teolo.

“Teolo is the highest town in the Euganean district. It is an idyll in itself—a perfect dream of a little hill town—built in the heart of that country, which the old Venetians loved to paint behind their saints and their madonnas. We met with awful difficulties in arriving there. We took a hired carriage from Rovigo, and started at 10 a.m. on a hot day to drive across the plain into the recesses of the hills. Our coachman knew nothing of the way, nor had he any intelligence of ways in general. The horses were a-weary of their lives before they had gone two miles, the day was unutterably baking, and Father could not forget that all his manuscripts were wandering away alone upon Gromboolian railways in a small portmanteau. Angelo roared at things in general, as is his invariable custom. Having started at ten, we arrived at midday where four cross-roads met. We were now absolutely at sea, and began our usual inquiries of quite incompetent guides. We had a fixed idea that we must reach a village called Vo. ‘In the name of the saints, where is Vo?’ thundered Angelo into the ear of a boy of six. ‘Where, cara sposa, oh, tell us

where is Vo?' from the coachman to a pretty girl, and, 'Where is Vo?' all round. The answers were so numerous, and so absolutely contradictory, that when a gentleman raised his voice above a neighbouring hedge and roared, 'You are all of you wrong!' we felt for the first time satisfied. This lordly but invisible being then pointed out a new direction, and we meekly followed it, toiling back along the way we had come. Arrived in a prosperous village we tumbled into its inn and ordered a meal. Whilst it was cooking I cheerfully said to the landlord, 'This place is Vo?' 'Oh dear no,' he answered me promptly; 'it is quite a different town.' Really this was like some evil dream. However, strange to relate, we had struck upon the very foot of the desired hill, so took our meal of rice and eggs and proceeded up it. Such flowers we found there! Father was compelled, by their beauty, to call a halt. Believe me, there was a bank enamelled over with white cistus, large geraniums, a new pink orchis, the giant shaking-grass, and, joy of joys, great flower-heads of the oft-desired fraxinella! I did wish for you. It was horribly hot and snaky on that bank. But a contadina with a spade came to the rescue at Angelo's commands and dug me up the fraxinella roots, whilst I collected as many of the beautiful things around me as I could in the time. This peasant woman was not surprised at our admiration

for the flower, but she assured me she knew nothing of its phosphorescent qualities, nor did she in the least credit what I said upon the subject. Yet her mud hut was surrounded with *fraxinella* bushes, and if there be any truth in the tradition, she surely ought to have known of it.

“We reached Teolo at about three that afternoon. The village is perched high on a shoulder of hill which joins the mount of the Madonna on to that of Pendice and Venda. On either side is stretched the plain. Looking down upon it, there is the usual strange effect of a summer sea, with church spires and scattered villages for sails. It was Sunday. All the village was out to gape at us, charming mountain men and girls dressed in coarse blue cotton of every shade. We drew up before the inn, a large white house which seemed composed entirely of windows, and very low. ‘You can only have one room,’ said the landlord; ‘the signorina can share it, or sleep with my family. There is another room,’ he continued, when his first proposals were met in silence, ‘but she had better sleep with the family.’ He, his wife, his grandmother, and daughters were not disagreeable; I had nothing to say against them; but the nights were hot. As we ascended the stairs I caught the magic word ‘*bachi*,’ and at once realised the situation, and that it was a choice of sharing my slumbers with the family or with their silkworms.

I of course chose the latter, and was shown into a vast apartment containing three pieces of furniture—the hugest bed you ever saw, a corn-bin, and an erection of wooden beams with layers of thatch stretched across it at intervals, containing millions of the small grey worm and their accompaniment of mulberry leaves. ‘The smell is not unwholesome,’ explained our genial host, ‘and the night air in May is hot. You may open your window, but there must be no draught.’ I liked to watch the silkworms and their ways. We then went out for a walk up Monte Pendice.”

This hill, unlike the rest of the Euganeans, is steep, and composed of rock. It is like a sharp spine on the back of a whale—the whale is Venda. The summit is crowned by the ruined remains of what was once a huge fortress. Very large must the building have been, for even now its bulwarks alter the line of the hill. Breezes play in and out of subterranean vaults, calling forth the ghosts of friars and imprisoned girls, and amongst the stones and heaps of masonry huge tufts of henbane flourish on buried bones. Indeed, one feels in a thousand ways that Pendice has had a past and that man has turned her slopes, her woods and crags, to his own uses. Nature has done all she can to cover the scars on the breast of this her daughter. But the feeling is there, and not lightly will chestnut copse, maidenhair, and a

thousand flowers in the grass efface the memory of man. Yet of all the Euganean hills Pendice holds the greatest claim to picturesque beauty. We stayed long upon her topmost crags, watching the shifting lights upon the plain. A small child played around us. Her little brown figure was scarcely hidden in a short shift. Her bare feet carried her over hard rock and into chilly caverns, from which she started laughing, to roll upon the sunny turf and catch at ivy-berries. She had gathered all the smiling sides of Pendice into her face; they shone in her charming brown eyes and rippled through her hair. She had a brother, a white goat, and a dog, and lived with her parents in a corner of the castle, which had been covered in for their use. It would have been impossible to find a thing more young and charming than Giacinta. She made a deep impression on me, and I shall often wonder what the after-life of that girl will be who was bred in the romantic regions of Pendice.

We returned to our inn at sunset. During supper, which we ate in the passage, three gaunt peasant women stepped into my room and proceeded to feed the silkworms with mulberry leaves, which they scattered thickly over the little creatures. For some caprice—I think to see the lights of Padua—my Father and I determined to ascend another hill that night. The sky was clouded over, there was no

single star. I shall not easily forget the manner in which we toiled and stumbled over rough paths and up grass banks. The only objects which I can remember out of the expedition were glow-worms and carraway flowers, and Angelo's screams as he made a fresh "tombola."

"So well did I sleep that night amongst the silkworms, that when aroused at five I was glad to see a thick mist creeping in through my windows, which quite put a stop to the ascent of the Madonna we had contemplated. I therefore went to sleep again. There was no milk or butter in the inn at Teolo. Black coffee with raw eggs is, I suppose, very wholesome—it isn't nice. The landlord had gone to market; only the grandmother was at home, and she asked my Father to draw up a bill as she had no views on the subject. This he did, greatly to his loss, and by seven we managed to get off in a country carriage to Padua. A more rotten or a dirtier framework, pulled by a sillier sort of animal, it was never my luck to ride in. However, we were made to feel that we ought to be extremely grateful to have it got out for us at all. Father, Angelo, myself, our hold-alls, and a typical Teolian clown, crowded into its intricacies and shambled away in the damp morning through avenues of endless plane-trees. It was a sleepy drive. Our driver had no eyes or ears save for the fair sex, whose bows he

sought by looks, and whose love he won by roses. On one occasion a lovely girl darted from a deserted palace with a mysterious bundle, which he, with endless composure, tied to the back of his box. This bundle swung against our noses during the rest of the drive. The clown then got down, and, leaving us planted in the middle of the road, began a long flirtation with the girl, which only ended when the two saw fit. His conduct was of that order which baffles the most intelligent, and we were powerless to interfere. Once we stopped by a ditch full of the grand snowflake flowers, of which I procured some roots. Then we jogged on. Covered with dirt, dust, and weeds gathered by the roadside, we at length neared Padua, but as we passed the exercising grounds outside that city we fell in with, and were surrounded by, a regiment of horse, and in this military fashion did we proceed to those 'Halls of the Lamp of Learning.' I suppose we looked wild and disreputable, for officers and men regarded us with undisguised interest and glee. But the worst was yet to come. Two custom-house officers came up and inquired what goods we were conveying into the town. 'We have nothing with us except dirty linen,' volunteered the imperturbable Angelo from off his box. The officials seemed perfectly satisfied, and thus your father and sister were palmed off upon the potentates of Paduan gates as any other set of

rag-bag Jews. The elegant officers dropped their glasses, even the subalterns sniffed, whilst their lovely horses passed our apocalyptic steed with snorts of scorn. Arrived within the city the clown became so bewildered by the multitude of fair ladies that he quite abandoned all further thoughts of driving. Gazing at upper windows where long-haired Paduans leaned over marble ledges, he wandered far out into unknown suburbs, and we had the utmost difficulty in getting him to retrace his steps. Also the horse turned his skull hither and thither in indescribable mystification. Scaffolding blocked our way, the street-boys jeered. By a mere fluke we at length drew up before the polished retinue of the Stella d'Oro. There we shook the dust from off us—and let us after all be frank and own that some of our greatest joys are those which can be afterwards described to our friends as 'journey tribulations.'"

After this date I spent some happy days at Venice, and in the first week of June returned to the Doge's Farm.



OLEANDER FLOWER.

CHAPTER VI

IN EARLY JUNE

“Quanti immagini un tempo, e quante fole
Creommi nel pensier l'aspetto vostro
E delle luci a voi compagne! allora
Che, tacito, seduto in verde zolla
Delle sere io solea passar gran parte
Mirando il cielo, ed ascoltando il canto
Della rana rimota alla campagna!
E la lucciola errava appo le siepi
E in su l'aiuole, susurrando al vento
I viali odorati ed i cipressi
Là nella selva.”

GIACOMO LEOPARDI, “LE RICORDANZE.”

THE whole air seems burdened with the scent
of flowering vine upon the pergola; the minds
of the mosquitoes have been dulled to stupor in the

house by the oppressive perfume of much lavender strewn in the linen cupboard.

There is an overwhelming sense of Nature's honey-pot being opened to the first long suns of June.

All round the church in the priest's garden you feel the honeysuckle, and long before you can see its yellow streamers you know it to be there, twining with the fainter jessamine. There is a wild distraction about the roses in this season too—each one is vying with another for scent and colour. There are small trees of white roses. They are weighted to the ground about their feet by clusters of the blossom, looking like trees in an Alpine summer, bowed to the earth by a storm of snow.

Privet and acacia shadow all the roads. The air is literally made stuffy by the intense fragrance of those white blossoms. He who has not passed through avenues of slim acacia-trees in early June can scarcely realise what a fair blue sky he lives under. I think nothing magnifies this blue so much as a white shower of that flower-snow above our heads.

And then the birds! The passion of the young spring's courtship may have died out of their song, but another joy has entered with the repose of heat, and all day long you hear them sing, till with the hush of evening the small ones cease—all save the nightingale; and with the night there comes

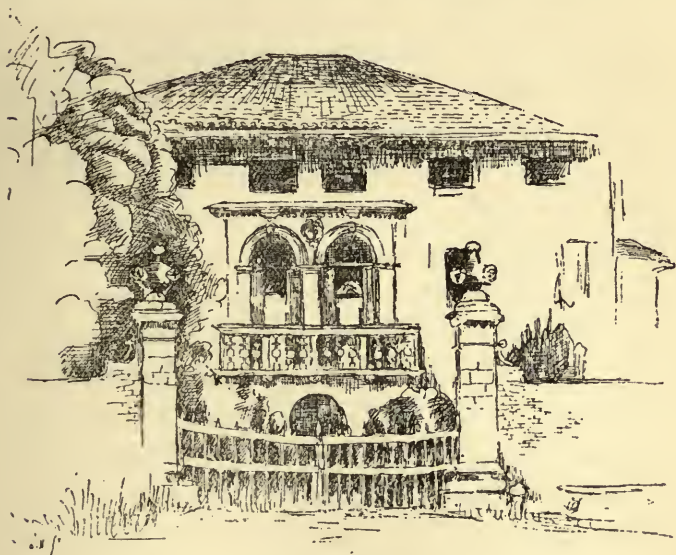
across the fields of corn the cry of little owls at play in the light of the moon, and of crickets and innumerable frogs.

No new words can convey to the reader a conception of the sounds and sights in those Italian nights : Leopardi did this once and for all in the few lines quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Sometimes I defied the fever-ghost, and sat out on the stone ledge of my balcony enjoying the full delight of those splendours which it was the object of every member of the household to shut out by bars and shutters. By slowly drawing the bolts I was able to emerge, unheard, into the night air, and the vision of outside beauty was one which never failed to encourage the continuance of this vicious habit. Dark carpeted rooms and shaded lamps between walls, and outside the calm splendours of a Lombard night ! The only penalty I paid was an additional "zooing" round my head at night, but these mosquitoes never seemed to bite. The candle attracted them, not the people.

My balcony was an ideal spot. You must go to Gromboolia to find another like it : a broad stone terrace, paved with scagliola, and crowded with great jars of oleander in full flower. Round it runs a marble balustrade, and below this the pergola, which shadows all the basement. Here roses, vines, and many sorts of creepers throw out long streamers to

meet pomegranite and wistaria upon the southern house wall. There, in the hush of those June nights, one hears them sing—the happy nightingales. I call them happy, for I do not believe that such floods of sudden rippling music were ever born of misery. It



ALL' ALBERA.

breaks uncalled for into the shadowy world, a song of morning before the night is well begun.

I spoke of a hush, but this is scarcely true, for there is no silence in the nights, only a sense of sound suppressed. There is a hum, a stir, a feeling of a life lived always after the setting sun. First, very many miles away, the faint hum of the masses ;

then, nearer, the distinguishment of all the several sounds. Frogs, and the small owl who cries like a wailing child, and the bigger owl who ruffles his heavy wings among the trees, and calls aloud with tremulous hooting; bats, flies, the click-click of interminable crickets, almost the moving of fire-flies in the grass, and the muffled squeaks of baby swallows talking in sleep below the eaves. Above, the big round summer moon, climbing over a clump of cedars in the garden—so big, so round, it covered all the heaven with light, obscuring every star and sun in the fathomless reaches of the sky. Its rays fell upon the rose-leaves by the pergola, and I could see the colours of the oleanders. The rose-leaves seemed quite white, they shone as though fresh rain had fallen on them. And as I watched I saw small moths were humming in amongst their flowers—brown filmy beings. There was no inch without its living creatures. A thin wind ruffled the air and stirred the rose-leaves. Sitting very still, I heard strange shuffling sounds like that of sudden footsteps on the gravel in the garden, and under the arcades. Did some old Pisani walk—come back to his farm in the form of a polecat, to see how a modern dogaresa kept it for him in the nineteenth century? One is well inclined to believe strange and unlikely things when living in large lonely villas upon the Italian plains.



CARDINAL'S UMBRELLA.

CHAPTER VII

THE MELANCHOLY OF THE PLAIN

“Et dans cet horizon, plein de grâce et d'ennui.”

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

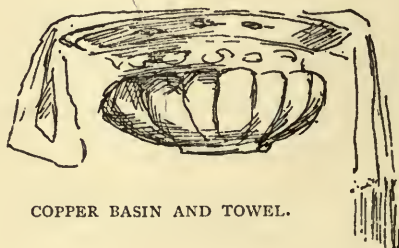
TO be truthful, I must state at once that the effect of life in this plain seems to be a saddening one. I am not speaking of the cities, for the people of Milan, Padua, Verona, leave an impression of brightness upon one's mind. I talk of the absolute country. Its natives have a look which the English word “hang-dog” expresses thoroughly. Yet this look only applies to the expression of their faces. It would be impossible to find a set of more sober or cleanly country people. Their houses are models of order and economy. The most miserable mud hut can be entered at any

hour of the day. Its big bed, stuffed with the husks of maize, will be spotlessly clean and smoothly made, although the hens may be running under it, and the turkeys sitting in baskets by its side. There



LIVING HOUSE, WITH EUGANEAN HILLS AND ALPS IN THE DISTANCE.

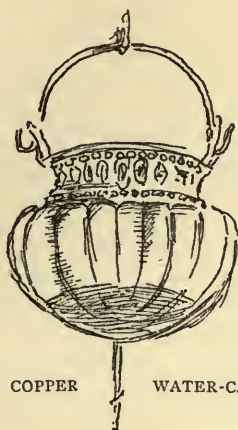
will not be a cinder on the hearth, save in the exact middle, where a neat pile of sticks crackle under the pot of polenta ; and however poor the inhabitants, there will surely be a good show of burnished copper



COPPER BASIN AND TOWEL.

pails or platters along the wall. Yet at this point any description of pleasing objects has to cease. The house is usually composed of two to three rooms on the basement—upper storeys are abhorred by the

native—its walls painted white, and usually composed of mud and reeds, the roof made of thatch, and not



COPPER

WATER-CAN.

a flower or a creeper to brighten the eternal vista of corn or maize.



FARMHOUSE AND STABLES.

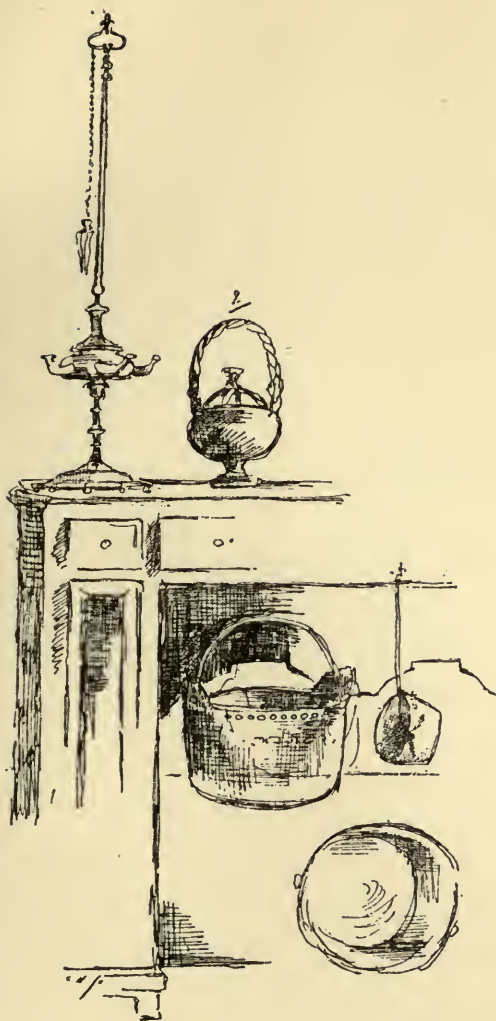
There is a saying, and one is almost inclined to

believe it true, that this land was originally stocked with inhabitants from the Venetian galleys. It was a miserable and marshy waste, into which no one chose to penetrate for personal pleasure or profit. Its owners therefore adopted this method of colonisation. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the Basso-Padovani have some feeling about their land which does not make them altogether rejoice in it. There is an habitual melancholy about them and their ways—a slow inaptitude for work which is deeply depressing to the exalted demands of the stranger.

I stayed amongst them through their happiest time—harvest; and although I suppose that in their own way they were happy, there was so little outward appearance of it that I could not remark any touch of gladness save in the hours of gleaning. The very songs which they sang at their work were weighted with a human misery which was almost discordant; and lacking any hope or sunshine such as may be reflected back upon a happier soul, they almost startled one.

The hours of work appeared to me to be very long. The harvesters began at three and ended at seven, with only four hours of rest.

As a race, the country folk are not good-looking, though they all possess the charm of lithe and easy movements peculiar to a warm climate. As they never wear shoes, their walk has acquired that ease



CORNER OF A GROMBOOLIAN KITCHEN.

and grace which is so hopelessly lacking in the mountaineer. The women, too, have the most magnificent hair, in which they feel just interest and pride. It is a remarkable and pleasing spectacle to drive along the roads on a Saturday evening, when every cottage lady lets down her abundant locks



FARMHOUSE, WITH VINE GROWN OVER THE PORCH.

before the house door, and has them combed and plaited for the ensuing week. They rarely if ever do their own hair, though it is an art in which they all excel. A carnation, or a sprig of golden-rod pinned over the right ear, adds a great charm to this coiffure. The hair is always parted in the middle, and is usually dark.

The women grow old before their time, and the men's hair turns early white.

The fever usually begins in August, when water is scarce, and green grapes and unripe corn are eaten without discretion. It is a dreadful curse, and the



IN THE VILLAGE OF VESCOVANA.

fear of it detracts in no small measure from the pleasures of a lover of summer nights, accustomed to enjoy their splendour hitherto in northern climes.

In the space of twelve months there have been

five suicides in the village of Vescovana alone. "Why do you wish to die?" asked the priest of a doctor's son, who, a few days later, proved the strength of his expressed desire.

"In the life of this place there is no joy of any kind. There is never anything new," answered the unhappy boy. For he was unhappy, through the excess of that thing which even in the rush of a town-life is called boredom.

Monotony—that is the best explanation of the melancholy I have described: the knowledge that all these crops will come and go, come and go again in the same field, in the same manner, and that, the wages paid, the cattle fed, and the taxes given, there will remain of all this plenty but just enough to keep body and soul over together till the next harvest season, and not one line be altered, not one stranger pass, nor ever a hill arise upon this interminable plain.



GREEN TREE-FROG.

CHAPTER VIII

FLOWERS OF THE PLAIN

"And nearer to the river's trembling edge
 There grew broad flag-flowers, purple pranked with
 white,
 And starry river buds among the sedge,
 And floating water-lilies, broad and bright,
 Which lit the oak which overhung the hedge
 With moonlight beams of their own watery light;
 And bulrushes, and reeds of such deep green
 As soothed the dazzled eye with sober sheen."

SHELLEY, "THE QUESTION."

THE flora is naturally limited upon this plain,
 where every available inch is cultivated by
 man. As one nears the hills a marked difference is

seen in the wild flowers. In the heart of Gromboolia, however, little variety is found, save in the ditches, or along the sides of the canals. Yet Shelley went out and made a wonderful nosegay in a ditch, and I think there are few flowers more lovely than those that grow in water. Apart from these, vetches are best represented. There is one with a white and lilac blossom. It grows along the dustiest highway, clean and fragrant, rising to a bush of sometimes two feet in height. Then there is its sister, whose flower-head is round, and who delights to climb up out of a ditch in company with her yellow brother, the water about their feet, and their heads resting in the pure light upon the maples or the privet bushes.

White and yellow nymphæas abound in certain parts; and the yellow iris, arrow-head, bog forget-me-not, loosestrife, and flowering rush are everywhere. The pond-weed grows in great abundance both in the ditches and stretches of sandy soil. Its flower stalk will measure three feet sometimes, the broad, green leaves contrasting strangely with such a feathery bloom. Some few salvias, daisy flowers, and umbelliferæ stray into the grass of the meadows, but they are rare.

The wonder of the flora appears in the first weeks of July. It is the convolvulus. Rightly the Americans have called that flower the Morning Glory. It was

Walt Whitman who said, "A morning glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books." In the early morning the hedges are literally transfigured by this flower. Hundreds and thousands of them clamber up the dingy thatch, the gates, and all the hedges, or writhe their slender tendrils round the wheat, or burst pale buds amongst the stalks or maize. It is the large white convolvulus which is most abundant; the pink one tries to overcome the dust along the edges of the roads—a small pure thing, so sweet and clean and bright, you marvel at its existence along the smothering highway.

Another cause for this scarcity of wild flowers is the great richness of the soil. It reaches to a depth of fifty centimetres, and is so thick and heavy that fibrous roots are withered and crushed in their attempts to penetrate it. Indian corn and wheat grow to a height and splendour which would astonish the English rustic. But then he might look in vain for the familiar primrose, the cowslip, or the periwinkle along these monotonous levels. Here is no copse, nor any little rill or flowering lane—always and always the cultivated fields. Nor would an English horse pull the plough across the sticky sods.

Early spring, with its violets, must indeed be a beautiful time in Gromboolia. I have never myself seen it, but find a letter of my sister concerning it, and quote from that :—

"Spring here is intoxicating certainly. It comes with a burst and fills one's heart and soul with a new sweetness. Could you see the violets here, I think you would cry. They flood the ground with their blue, they nod their little heads and pass away into the dark pine shade of the garden. They fill the air with strongest scent. Come quickly before they die. Every ditch and hedge and dusky bank is alive with them. I never saw such a world. The blackbirds have been singing so hard—it seemed they must get tired. But they never do. And the larks are mad. Madame Pisani has just brought in a bunch of tulips, gold and scarlet single ones, narcissus too, and daffodils. Every day new flowers come out."

.

A great many beetles and birds and grubs inhabit Gromboolia, and dragon-flies innumerable. The blue dragon-fly is bigger than his brethren. His body measures over two inches in length, and is painted like a turquoise. The red one is smaller, but so brilliant in colour you can see his quivering form upon the trunk of the willow-trees from a great distance. The green one is so common that I have literally seen a small cloud in the air of the garden composed entirely of these shining insects.

If any one felt a desire to study the life and customs of the peacock butterfly, he should come to these parts in June. Then the pale lilac of the

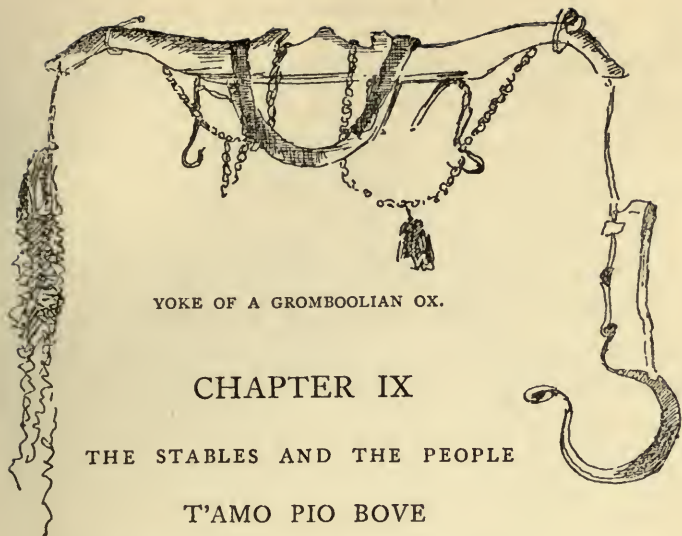
lucerne fields is all speckled over with large black wings, which, lazily unfolding to the heated air, disclose those brilliant points of colour so rare in other parts, seen in such myriads here. Also in the corn-fields, where the purple thistles grow, sometimes too well to please the farmer, though not thick enough to gratify the greedy colour-love of painters, you will find the peacock butterflies in crowds playing amongst the down.

There are a good many birds even in this country, where the tiny body of a blackcap or the breast of a nightingale is considered fit food for a man. I know too little of their names to attempt to number them; but wild-duck and water-hen, with sometimes a grey crane, are found in the marshes. Doves in great numbers, cuckoos, small hawks, and starlings flourish in the fields; whilst every kind of singing bird flocks to the garden, together with magpies, woodpeckers, and water-wagtails. The butcher bird is the most marked feature in the bird foreground of Gromboolian landscapes. On every hedge or willow-tree you will see his dapper, well-groomed form, with the neat grey waistcoat and elegant brown wings, the black ear-caps and smoky wideawake, so well in keeping with the surrounding tone of colour. I have never been able to see him at his work of impaling beetles, but there is a murderous determination about his little eyes.

Frogs are the peculiarity of Lombardy. The very causes which prevent the existence of other plants and animals make theirs a joy. The country is simply laid out for them. In June nights they raise their voices over the entire land—the whole of North Italy seems composed of frogs. In July their voices are still, but the tadpoles leave the ditches in which they have been reared, and when you walk along the roads or fields it is brought home to you pretty thoroughly in what manner the Egyptians were plagued. Hundreds and thousands of small black objects hop off at your approach. The green tree-frog is undeniably a fascinating reptile. On every tree, and on the leaves of rushes, you will find his small body, green as the grass, pressed tight against his seat. The keen black eyes twinkle, the little white sides throb. Entranced, you try to pick him up, and off he jumps across the ditch to balance on some waving stalk or rush. You cannot believe that this small shining emerald will, as night falls, produce those deep and guttural sounds which almost overcome the songs of nightingales, and pall on the sensitive ear. Perhaps Nature has created nothing more fragile or more lovely than the baby tree-frog.

There are quantities of water-snakes in all the ditches. As you walk along you see a small head passing over the weeds and water, with behind a

long and writhing body—grey-green and speckled. Others may sing the praises of the water-snake : he fills my whole soul with repulsion, although I know him to be as harmless as the lovely baby tree-frog.



YOKE OF A GROMBOOLIAN OX.

CHAPTER IX

THE STABLES AND THE PEOPLE

T'AMO PIO BOVE

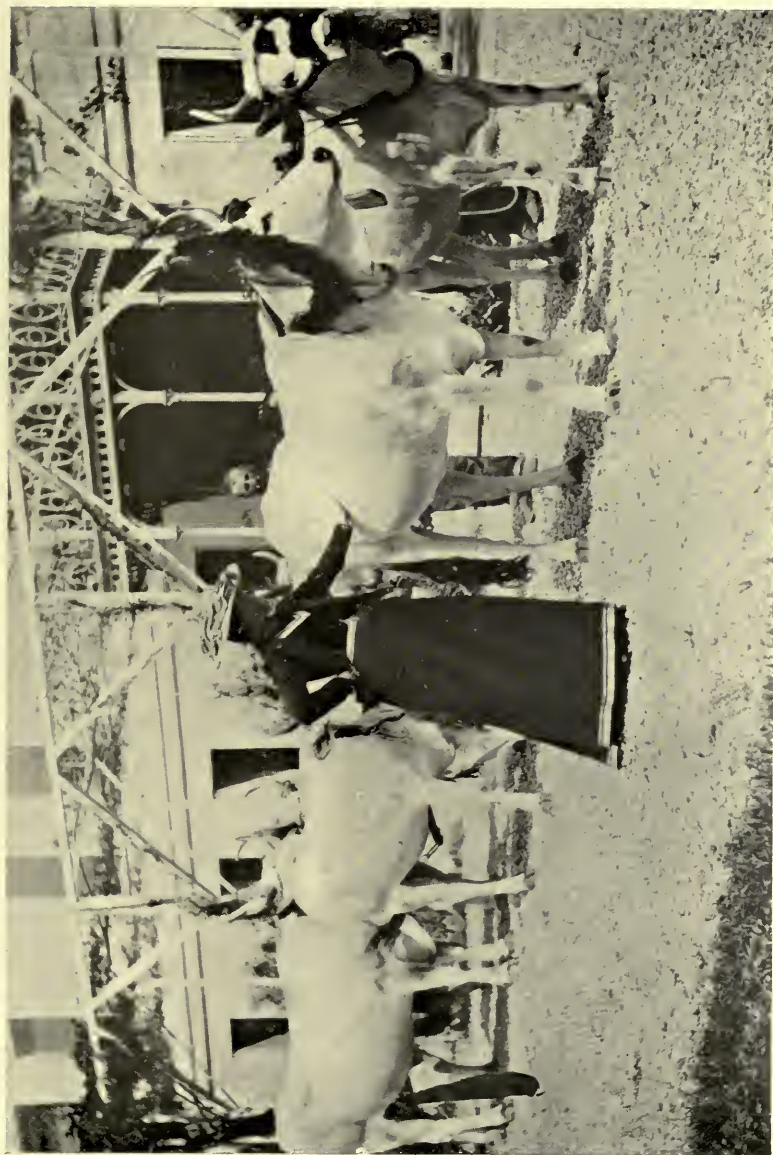
"I love thee, pious ox ; a gentle feeling
 Of vigour and of peace thou giv'st my heart.
 How solemn, like a monument, thou art !
 Over wide fertile fields thy calm gaze stealing,
 Unto the yoke with grave contentment kneeling,
 To man's quick work thou dost thy strength impart.
 He shouts and goads, and answering thy smart,
 Thou turn'st on him thy patient eyes, appealing.
 From thy broad nostrils, black and wet, arise
 Thy breath's soft fumes ; and on the still air swells
 Like happy hymn, thy lowings mellow strain.
 In the grave sweetness of thy tranquil eyes
 Of emerald, broad and still reflected, dwells
 All the divine green silence of the plain."

Translated from the Italian of Carducci, by FRANK SEWALL.

WHEN Count Almorò III. died he left the
 whole of his property and the entire manage-
 ment of it to his wife. This lady knew nothing

of farms or farming. She had lived her life hitherto wholly in the villa, or driving her ponies away into the hills during the months which she and her husband spent on their Italian estate. Her care had been for her house and garden. She left the bailiffs and tenants to her husband.

Armed with the peculiar intelligence of a woman, common sense, and a deep human sympathy—also a considerable love of command—she entered upon her new duties. They were certainly not light ones, nor had the way been well prepared for her. The first thing which she realised was that the oxen were the chief feature—the absolute necessity in Lombard economy. Therefore care of her stables was her immediate duty. Of Pisani cattle there were then but twenty on a territory of 3,000 acres; and ten oxen are considered the right number to plough sixty acres in those parts. The only hopeful side of this apparently desperate matter was that the Pisani breed was famous for its strength and beauty. Most of the Contessa's land was in the hands of peasant tenants. She received small rents from these people, whose object it was to strain her ground in every possible way, and weaken its powers of production through narrow-sightedness. It may be imagined that her income from the estate was small indeed when the taxes and everything else had been paid, and there is no one who will not admire and marvel



A TEAM OF OXEN IN THE GARDEN AT VESCOVANA

Photo by Miss L. Duff Gordon

at the power and energy of this lady when they hear that after twelve years of her personal management the Pisani estate can number five hundred head of cattle, and that nearly all the farms are in good condition in her own hands, managed by herself through bailiffs whom she selects and pays with the produce of the land. All this without further capital than the land itself—putting back yearly what she takes out. At the time in which I write the Pisani estate is reckoned one of the best managed in that part of the country, and the stables are considered as models which people will travel far to see. Englishwomen are said to be capable of wonderful things. Certainly I have met one at least in a remote corner of Italy whose life work is no trifling matter.

Wearisome to a degree, tiring and apparently unprofitable, is the round of great and small affairs which pass through that single head and are settled by that single hand day after day, season after season. From the choice of a bailiff to the dismissal of a cowboy, from the building of an outhouse to the summons of a neighbour to the law courts, nothing is too hard nor yet too trivial for her notice. She designs her stone-carts, she selects her sugar. She orders the dinner, and she receives at it an empress or an engineer. Nothing is too small, and certainly nothing too big, to be decided by this autocrat of Gromboolia. In consequence of which facts strange

stories circulate about the lady and her kingdom in other parts of Italy.

It was said in Florence that when population threatened to decrease on the Pisani estates, their mistress summoned all the unmarried youth of her farms under the *barchesse* of Vescovana, there divided them into rows, regarded their features, and summed up their characters in the space of some minutes, then made a match and decreed the immediate matrimony of those pairs she had selected thus : "You, Celeste, shall marry Tabarro. Your figure is tall and slim, his is broad and firm—you will pull along together. And you, young Gallo, can take to yourself Maria. She is a good cook, though she is fat. You will submit to her rule, for you are rather weak-minded, and you will poach no more in my ponds. You two there have black and yellow hair, and will match very well together," &c., &c. The story went that these matches were at once completed—the word of the Contessa being law.

I need scarcely say that there was no more truth in this than in any other gossip of the like nature. A mustard seed dropped by the roadside had produced a forest of oaks. That the mustard seed did drop I cannot deny, for it is certain the Contessa takes a lively and patriarchal interest in the concerns of her people, and that the older ones ask her advice in the love affairs of their children. I know this for certain,

having been present at like strange discussions, marvelling at the unparalleled candour and unconcern with which delicate topics were handled. Indeed the voice of the mistress is raised as surely over the question of whether Joanna shall or shall not keep company with Umberto, as of whether corn has or has not been stolen from the threshing-floor. No one, however, must believe that the Gromboolians are a race without romance. This people's nature is capable of passionate attachments and immovable loves. I know the story of a girl whose lover had forsaken her in spring. In summer she fell sick of heart-break. In the fall of the year she died. The Contessa went to see her during her last illness. "The autumn air is chill and damp. It is dreary for you and sad," she said. "Oh, no," answered the dying girl, "I am fond of the autumn, for then the leaves are fallen from the trees, and I can watch the window or my love."

Yet this lover had proved false to her, and for the loss of his love she died.

I shall not forget the extraordinary episode which I witnessed one morning in Gromboolia. It was a dead hot day—hotter than any other day I had yet awakened to. All the same, we went out into it at about eleven, for there was a hitch in the threshing-machine at the Pioppa which the Contessa's presence was expected to mend. The Pioppa, so called

because of a certain poplar-tree which shadows its well, is one of the smallest farms on the estate. It is nearly eight miles from Vescovana if one drives to it in the Calais-Douvre along Napoleon's road ; but if one is mean, and the conductor of gigs, one can approach it by a very narrow bridge spanning the Gorzone Canal. This the Contessa consented to do on that hot morning, and so she travelled *incognita*, and the youth of the Doge's Farm went its wicked way regardless of her presence. No one ever paid the slightest regard to the gig, which usually contained nothing further than a mad "Inglesina" and a servant. They never dreamed that the padrona herself would condescend so far as to drive in it. When we came to the hill below the canal we stopped to adjust some bottles of Epsom Salts packed at our feet. A girl was leaning over the bridge. She was a beautiful creature, though small and delicate—of fifteen summers, not more. Her black hair fell in heavy locks over her moody brow ; her slim figure bent like the willow in the waters below her. All the melancholy of the plain was gathered into her eyes. I watched her curiously, and pointed her out to the Contessa. A young man with a great swagger and of considerable beauty ran up the dusty road. The girl watched him coming, and as she did so an extraordinary joy mixed with anguish swept over her. The young man kissed her. Then he

passed on, swinging his tall and handsome figure in the noonday heat. He never looked back to the girl on the bridge.

"Are they engaged?" asked the Contessa of an old woman crouched on the threshold of a neighbouring farm.

"No, Signora Contessa. He loves another girl."

"Ah! *She* alone is *innamorata*, then?"

"Yes."

(This was only too evident.)

"Hola!" said the Contessa, as I whipped Bandis up the hill. "*You* love that *briccone* when he does not love you—*don't!*" she decreed from under the awning of the gig as we passed the unhappy girl. "And you," she called, in pursuit of the gay deceiver—"you shall never kiss one girl in my property when you really are in love with another!"

I believe if this imperious lady owned Westminster she would attempt to control its slums. She complains that her people do not obey her, but they at least ask her opinion of their most trifling concerns, and she rules them in a marvellous manner. There is no single one of her farms which is not kept in fit order for her critical eye to survey it at any hour of the day when she may choose to turn up. And she *does* turn up regularly in the course of time. Nothing escapes her notice, from the extra hen

poaching in her crops to the last batch of kittens squealing in the hayloft.

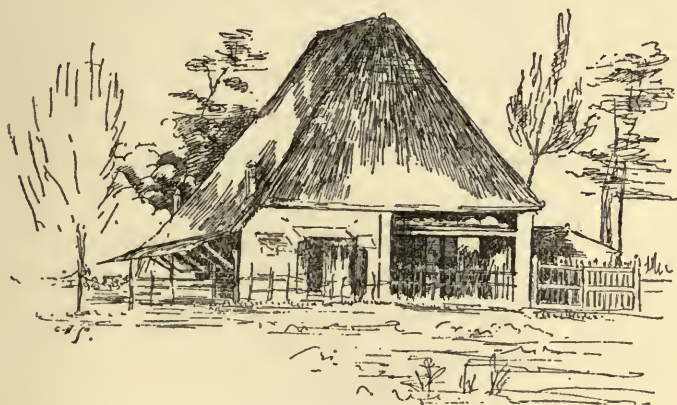
When Madame Pisani assumed the reins of office her farms were in a state of abandonment and decay which no one can imagine who sees them in their present prosperity. Her husband had expended



FARM OF THE MANFREDINI.

all his energy in draining the land and clearing off the mortgages. So she reaped this advantage from labours which are none the less because they show so little. She at once set to work to clean out the filth of the Augean stables, to pull down and rebuild their ill-planned and decaying walls. The low roofs,

the stuffy, ill-drained floors, were exchanged for high beam-ceilings, with barns above wherein to stack the hay, and clean stalls and pathways down the middle. Each stall has a neat open window before it to rejoice the large inquiring eyes of its inhabitants and keep them bright. Through these little windows you can see tiny silhouettes of distant trees, and sometimes a faint blue Euganean hill is framed between the horns



STABLES, FONTANA.

of a Lombard ox. Outside the row of windows runs an awning of rush matting to obstruct the hot rays of summer suns and check the frosts of winter. At either end of the stable there is a big door kept always open to admit the sweetest air. A blue cotton curtain hangs across this entrance. Big bunches of mint and willow dangle from the ceiling and attract the meddling flies. The cowherds' beds

are built into the middle stalls—broad wooden ledges like the berths of a ship—stuffed with hay, and pink check pillow-cases. An image of Saint Anthony—the patron of the stables—a calendar, or a Saint George, are nailed to the wall above, and opposite is the toilet-table of the oxen. Here hang the long light yokes, the shining chains and crimson *ciapogliere*. The stalls are always very clean, the straw in them is dry and rustling. You can go and sit in the big smooth mangers and caress the baby calves. Indeed the stables on the Doge's Farm are pleasant places. Hours I have spent in them, studying with love and admiration their soft-eyed inhabitants. The great beasts rarely get excited, and they like to be caressed by man. They very easily learn to love one, and turn huge heads to meet caresses just as willingly, I vow, as salt or hay. Their spreading horns, measuring from two to three feet across, are admirably controlled, unwieldy though they seem. They rarely jerk them up, and when you stroke them they are warm and smooth like silk. Also the oxen know their names—their wonderful classical or modern English names. "Gladstone" and "Homer," "Cymbeline" and "Alcibiades," draw up their colossal haunches and arise from their knees when called. And I must here put in a word for the extraordinary intelligence of the abused Gromboolian cowherds, who, totally unable to read or write, can



Photo by Professor F. Trombini

OXEN AT THE WELL.

yet learn off a string of these strange titles which convey no single meaning to their ears.

Madame Pisani tells me that when first she came to Vescovana the cowherds imagined that they could pay her no greater or more signal compliment than by calling one of their cows "Contessa." Therefore, when walking in the fields one day, she was arrested by yells of "Contessa." These, however, she found to be addressed to a beautiful white cow ploughing in the neighbouring stubble. She tells me also that under the Austrian Government a cowherd, called Magrin, was had up before the police for naming his bull "Imperatore." The poor man said in self-defence, and to the general amusement of the court, "*Che credeva onorare sua Maesta, perche il toro era bellissimo !*"

There is an immense dignity about the bulls and oxen. The young cows are somewhat more wayward; they jerk about, shrug their shoulders, or hide their pretty faces when you come to speak to them; with age they too acquire a greater calm and courtesy. The "beauty" of the last season betrays a soft and saddened light in her lustrous eyes with the advance of years. "Roma" was the reigning beauty when first I came to Vescovana. Oh! just wasn't she vain and fickle, and how contemptuously she snorted when we gave her salt! Now Roma has brought up five fair daughters, and turns to welcome me as

quietly as does the big "Magnifico." "Pistoja" champed up Roma's crown of roses, and this year the flowers of beauty wreath "Lottina's" brow.

From their birth down to their death these creatures are treated with kindness and consideration by their mistress, who never wearies of seeing to their comfort. When they are three weeks old they are taken from their mothers, who have to return to work, and can no longer nurse them, and they are put into one of the "schools." Some neat black mountain cows of staid and genteel behaviour superintend the *crèche*. This *jeunesse dorée* of Gromboolia has a very fine time of it in childhood, sporting at ease in the broad meadows, with the willow hedge allotted to its use. "Let them enjoy themselves and romp and stretch—grow tall and strong," says their mistress. "There will be time enough for care and work later on." One of the pleasing spectacles upon the Doge's Farm is that of the inmates in a *pensionnât de demoiselles* playing about and kicking up their heels at sundown before they are sent to bed.

At the age of three the young people are "brought out," and this is no less an occasion in that line of life than it is in ours. The great decision has then to be made of who shall be coupled with whom, and this is an extremely important matter—much more so than the appointment of partners in a ballroom, for the couples now chosen will work together for

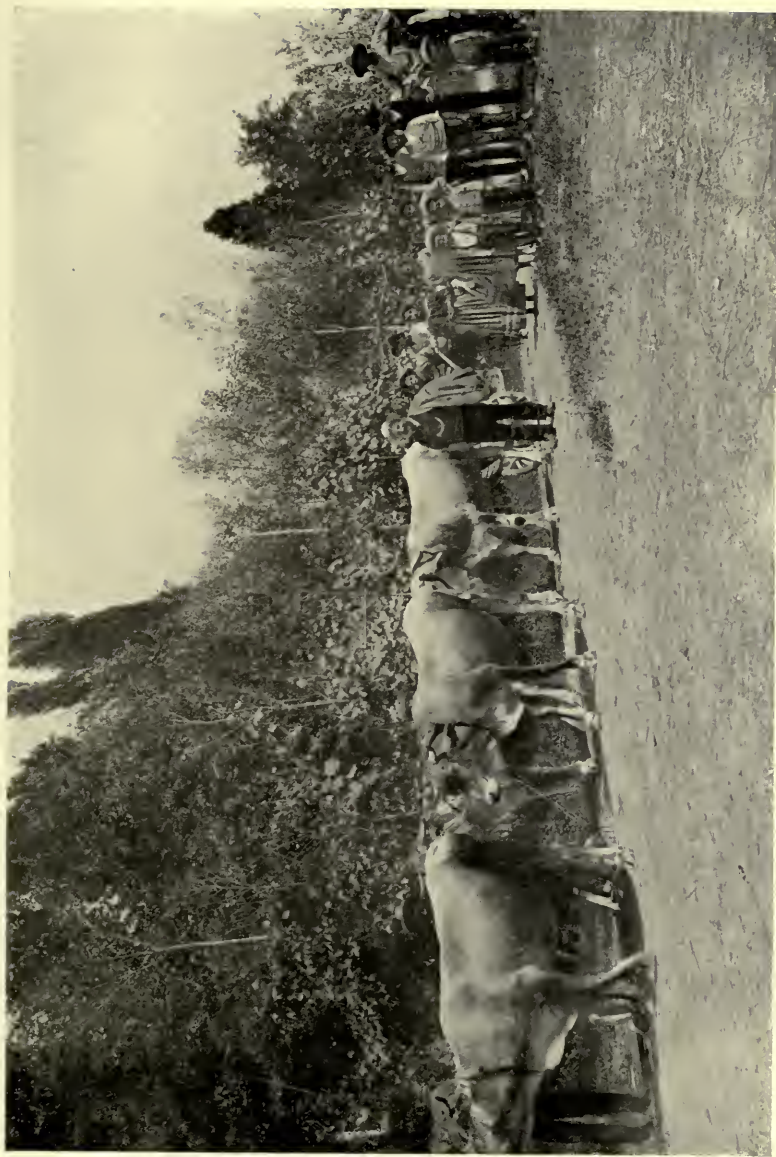


Photo by Professor F. Trombini

OXEN AND PEASANTS

life. No single piece of work can be performed by one alone ; even the garden-roller must be pulled by a pair. One would be absolutely lost without the other. Sometimes, after all the toil of selection, it will be found that "Olina," say, refuses to pull with "Tennyson," and all the trouble begins again. Or, as sometimes happens, the one dies first, or a change is made absolutely necessary on a farm. Then the big beasts become moody beyond words and halt heart-broken. It would, however, be exaggeration to state what I have often heard reported as a fact, that these Italian cattle die upon separation. That would be a very rare and hardly likely occurrence, though their affections are undeniably deep.

No artist could paint on canvas, or writer tell in prose, the charm of Italian oxen, nor could a poet sing the beauty of their eyes. One thing is certain : the plain would be a desert without them—a heaven without its saints—a meadow void of flowers. It is a grand sight to see them adorned in all their best and brought out for show to visitors at Vescovana. On certain occasions some of them are harnessed to an immense van painted pale blue, like a bird's egg, and hung with crimson cloth. In this extraordinary erection there are wooden seats on which the privileged guests may sit and be drawn in triumph through Gromboolia, all heads uncovering before the mighty car of Juggernaut.

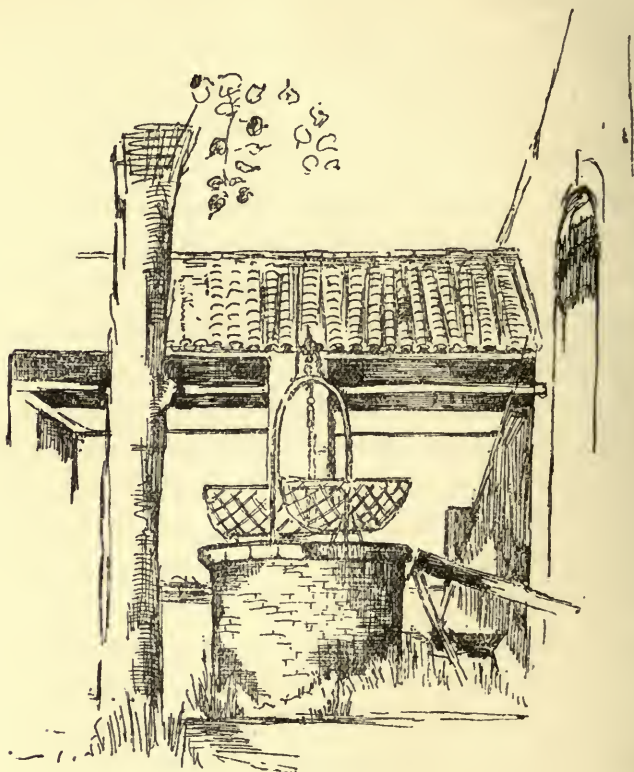
It is a most cruel thing to force more work out of these patient animals than natural laws have proved to be good for them. Because of their immense size, they move slowly, and easily tire during the heat of the day. As I have before said, eight or ten oxen can do the work of sixty acres. The Pisani farms have most of them about a hundred and twenty acres of ground, so there are from fifteen to twenty oxen on each. A fourth part of the land goes to support the oxen, who are fed upon lucerne and clover mixed with straw. Green grass they rarely, if ever, get, yet it is their favourite food. They love it very much, and the eyes of the most modest ox will water and his big nose tremble when a bundle of sweet young maize stalks is brought to him after his hot ploughing in the fields. Many joyful minutes did I spend along the hedges by the yard, tearing up those much desired dainties, and bringing them into the mangers of my big and kindly friends. Such snorts, such muffled cries and swishings of the tails ran down the length of a whole stable when I entered with the cowboys carrying these adored but little tasted delicacies. I could go into the stalls of the strongest bulls and oxen, and feed them with my hands to see that justice was maintained and the grasses duly shared. They welcomed me with extreme though eager kindness. Their manners were as excellent as those of modern youth are often

bad at the pastry-cook's or dinner-table. As for the Contessa—they all love her and know her. They often scream with joy when they hear her footstep in the doorway.

The bulls have beautiful brazen coverings to their horns. These shine in the light when they are ploughing, and attract all eyes to admire the beauty and grandeur of their wearers. *Magnifico* is the finest bull on the *Pisani* estate, and indeed he is worthy of his name. He lives at the *Carbonara*; he was born and bred in the property; there is no bull in all *Gromboolia* like him. I ceased to admire any other bull to the Oracle when I met them on our wanderings, for they never combined all the beautiful points of *Magnifico*. His head is huge; he has a fine black fringe which curls upon his kindly brow; his horns are not too long; there is a grey tinge like shot satin on his coat, and when he walks—well, you need not be ashamed of crying out in wonder at his stately and imperial carriage. *Pistoja*, the beauty of the last season, and *Plon Plon*, the large and satisfactory ox, inhabit the same stable as *Magnifico*, and *Elvira* is the daughter of its cow-herd. I always connect the two together—the big *Gromboolian* bull, and the little *Gromboolian* girl.

I cannot pass *Elvira* by, nor ever forget her. Some day, in dreams, I shall see her come along some shadowy path, bringing the sunlight with her,

and hear again her brown feet softly pattering along the grasses under the willow or the chestnut hedge, as I heard them when she came to meet me on



WELL AT THE PIOPPA.

summer days through the thick dust and the evening glow. Elvira is an altogether perfect creation ; she is so fat, so round, so very amiable—small and shining like some baby buttercup. There is no fault to find

in all her little form. Her dry, brown hair, always dusty at the tips, is bound around her head in two tight braids. It breaks in tiniest curls across her low and sunburnt forehead, which is smooth like chestnut fruits just opened. When she smiles her teeth are like seed-pearls. There is a little hollow where her fat neck joins her pretty shoulders. She often shrugs her shoulders lightly, as though to show that the trials of life are very tolerable. Fine ladies might come to school with her for graces. I do not know why Elvira liked me first. I almost feared it was the silver beasts upon my chatelaine which so attracted her, or the portraits of familiar cocks upon my fan. She had, however, no taste for finery, and when we walked together, hand in hand, we regarded each other's eyes. Hers were large and extremely dark and grave, but all the sweets of Gromboolia had entered them and filled them with intelligence and brightness. She was dressed with simplicity, and an extreme neatness was always shown in her attire, which consisted of a tight bodice laced at the back, a chemise, and several cotton petticoats. She used to stoop and pull her short skirt very decidedly over her bare ankles, then curl out her funny toes, and pin her kerchief with precision across her neck. Once I gave her a gown. "I prefer the colour red," she said distinctly. I bought it at the Friday fair, and carried it to her in

a hurry late one evening. "My grandmother must buy me the lining," she said gravely. Elvira had only smiled on six short summers, and I, who had known twice that number more, had forgotten it. I brought her a little bone image of Saint Anthony, which she pinned to her bodice by a bit of silk and afterwards lost. "You should have hung it round your neck," I suggested. "That," she answered, "is no longer our fashion." For whole days she sought among the sand-heaps and ploughed fields for her lost saint, and the smile was lacking in her eyes. Don Antonio sent her a silver medal, but she did not love it. One day she found Saint Anthony, and after that she ignored the fashions.

Two weeks ago Elvira sent me a present by my father—a little bunch of double daisies and Indian marigolds done up in a bit of paper. Not all the chrysanthemums from the Doge's Farm could please me more than these dwarf blossoms tended and picked in the heart of Gromboolia by that little Gromboolian girl.



DOGE'S CAP.

CHAPTER X

A GROMBOOLIAN SERENADE

I HAVE compared the Doge's Farm to Tennyson's "Palace of Art," but unlike the "Soul" in that poem, mine found small joy in "singing my songs alone." Be it indeed confessed that my desires went out with the

" . . . darkening droves of swine
That range on yonder plain."

In our magnificent but solitary drives I longingly looked at the high walls round the villas of our unknown neighbours, and knew their oleanders bloomed not a whit less sweetly than did those upon my balcony, and I saw that their strange gigs and conveyances were pulled by ponies no less pretty than the one I drove.

The vulgar desire of a tourist—the feverish wish to know about things and people—had even tinged my joys with minutes of discontent. I was inwardly assured that Gromboolia was not an uncivilised and barbarous waste outside the limits of the Doge's Farm. I was aware that it had its society, its fashions, and its conversation. Uninteresting though the bulk of these might possibly prove to be, I still desired to turn its pages, and to read them with my own inquiring eyes. This desire was to be fully gratified.

One Sunday afternoon we started out as usual to visit farms. As we approached the village of Stanghella a clash of brazen instruments announced the presence of a band. I felt greatly excited. Often as we had passed and repassed that piazza we had never heard a sound like this. Stanghella had struck me as something of an Egyptian catacomb, peopled with handsome mummies, and swathed only in the melancholy peelings of its plane-trees. To-day there was noise, bustle, and a crowd. My spirits and those of my Southern friend rose to the novel sensation. As our carriages traversed the crowd, the *sindaco*, or mayor, of Stanghella stepped forth from the steps of the *municipio* and begged the Contessa to grace the performance of their new *musica* by her presence. She consented. In the late evening we returned from the farms. We drew up before

the *municipio*, and alighted on the steps of that mysterious mansion whose grim and ugly façade had often excited my curiosity. We marched in state up the echoing stairs, and were put upon seats in its huge and empty hall. We were horribly select; we sat on tilting chairs beside the window—that is to say, my chair tilted in my eagerness to see. We were grouped in a semicircle; the *sindaco* and his wife, the postmaster (a youth of great elegance), the bailiff of the squire, and the schoolmistress formed the audience. It was an extremely hot evening, and I for one felt far from happy put up there to public view, with my admired *popolo* so far below me. I was in full sympathy with the young lady who said that she “hated to be hulched in a caroché.” I particularly disliked to be hulched in a *municipio*. However, the first step into Gromboolian “society” had been taken.

Below us there were all the inhabitants of the land, crowding round a raised platform where the *jeunesse dorée* of Stanghella were standing and blowing into new and brazen instruments. That the performance was crude one could not deny, but that the energy and goodwill bestowed upon it surmounted its failure was also the truth. The *musica* had only been started some seven months before, and already twenty-eight members had joined it, and succeeded in playing in concert. They

had a *maestro* from the neighbouring town of Rovigo, and the young gentlemen of Stanghella encouraged and presided over them.

"Indeed their performance is admirable," I volunteered to one of our hosts.

"Which piece in the programme do you prefer, most illustrious young lady?"

"Impossible to select," I cried, for in truth I had noted an extreme similarity in the pieces. Then, anxious to suggest the right thing, I inquired whether they perhaps were acquainted with the March of Garibaldi. The question was received with a strangely suppressed glee by the circle of the select.

Down went the *sindaco* into the square, and very soon that music which even the youths of Stanghella could not deprive of its power of "go" broke forth, and shook down the bark from the plane-trees. The multitude roared "*Bis, bis!*" The ice was broken.

The following day the brass band of Stanghella sent in a request to serenade the ladies of Vescovana. Vescovana replied that the proposal was accepted. The date, the hour, the mode of arrival and of departure were elaborately arranged. Unluckily I have not got this almost legal correspondence in my hands. It would certainly serve to shatter every preconceived notion of serenading. For a Grom-

boolian serenade is not at all the romantic moonlit affair we all have heard or made for ourselves in the mirage of our minds. It is extremely well arranged and thought about by unimpassioned swains.

Two weeks later the event took place. As the day drew near an immense excitement throbbed through the inhabitants of the Doge's Farm. The servants felt that the right thing was about to be done—that social amenities were to be received and bestowed between themselves and their neighbours. The lower rooms were filled with flowers, and carpets spread on the steps of the entrance hall. The music-stands were placed in the sweep amongst the roses, and at 6 p.m. the music arrived—the guests at the same hour. We all sat down in great stiffness on chairs on the steps. We were again most select. There were Signor Merlin and his wife—tenant farmers on some Pisani estates; the president of the music, his baliff, the *sindaco* and his wife, and the stationmaster of Stanghella.

All these people were terribly inquisitive. "Why did you go to Rovigo in the heat of the day?" "Do you prefer fish to beef?" and "Why do you come to this country?" &c.—were the sort of questions we became accustomed to hear and to answer.

Into the midst of this circle strayed two English ladies, bent upon a Sunday call. They were

members of a party of artists who had taken up their abode at Teolo in the Euganeans for purpose of painting. It was a remarkable interruption, and Gromboolia was gratified by the unpremeditated compliment. At this minute the music struck up—that music where everything seemed trumpets. The populace of Vescovana crowded itself against the gates.

The evening was extremely sultry, and all the light of the setting sun fell upon our uncovered heads. The stationmaster held a flaring red parasol over my head in a manner to obstruct the view of the orchestra and *popolo*, and to concentrate all the sun's rays upon the back of my neck. Several presidents and conductors of the music joined our circle. At intervals everybody ate biscuits and drank black coffee, wine, or other refreshments. It is certain that the musical side of the serenade was the least part of the day's doings in the eyes of the audience, and I may almost add of the performers. During the longest pause in the programme the whole society turned into the garden and wandered through the labyrinths of Crispin de Pass, pausing at every bower. The one point in this garden which attracted their criticism was the sweet-pea hedges. "What!" cried the bailiff of innumerable farms. "Uneatable peas, and in such abundance!" Then all the gentlemen bent in

amaze over such marked peculiarity of taste on the part of an English lady. The cultivation of uneatable peas was a folly they scarcely could credit.

"Never mind," said the Contessa gently in my ear, "a year hence their gardens will be stocked with the same flower." She has already-peopled Gromboolia with scarlet-runners.

A timorous cornet summoned us back to our serenade. Unequal vales and smooth mazurkas were diligently rendered. Towards the end of the performance the stationmaster thought fit to inquire of me what were my political views. I replied in a loud and cheerful voice that I knew nothing of politics, but in sentiment was a Republican. This information so excited the stationmaster that he jumped off his seat and almost impaled me on my own parasol. He summoned the *sindaco*, and these two gentlemen became entirely purple in their attempts to disillusion one who had no illusions. For it was the fire which the youths of Stanghella had put into their brazen instruments when they played the Garibaldi March which had excited me to the above speech. I had feared their slim forms would burst, and that the *maestro* would fall from his tub when the first invigorating bars had been commenced. Also the populace roared their delight outside the gates. Gromboolians had received fire into their souls, and imparted it to mine.

"Don't talk of republics, dearest young lady," panted the stationmaster: "suggest the Marcia Reale."

I obeyed, but my spirit groaned as I listened to the twaddling and uneventful strains of that royal anthem. The *popolo*, too, set up a dismal howl. Yet I protest it was not disloyalty, but pure musical instinct which so influenced our feelings.

Towards eight the company broke up, leaving us with the delightful feeling of having had a "social success."

That was the last I heard of the "musica di Stanghella," for its performances are extremely rare. But later in the season I was privileged to hear a little more Gromboolian music. I paid a visit to the hills, and returned from them fired with enthusiasm for the songs I had heard sung by the people there, and with an ambition to know what the young men of the plain could produce in the same line. A., out of some novel caprice, favoured the plan, and invited the youth of his parish to come one evening into the *barchesse* and sing to us. They came. The air was hot, the sky was clouded over; it had rained all day. The young men stood in the shadow under the jasmine trees. Strange howling choruses and songs suddenly broke the silence of the night. We stood in the balcony above and listened. There was a peculiar

melancholy scream at the end of every verse. I dare not call it musical. But barbaric dances clash, and yet they charm. So it is with the people's songs. I would gladly have listened to those wonderful strains for a longer period, but this was not to be. It so happened that an upholsterer from Milan and a tinsmith of Venice had lately arrived on the Doge's Farm. These gentlemen, being themselves possessed of no inconsiderable musical talent, rushed out upon a scene where they would be enabled to show it off to the full. Absolutely regardless of the other chorus, they began a rival concert under the pomegranates in the opposite *barchesse*!

Never shall I forget that night of song! Its discords and discomfort were appalling.

"Teresina, Teresina, Teresina!" thundered the Gromboolians, whilst the wailing voice of the romantic tinsmith pierced above their healthier choruses, singing the death of an enamoured girl in tones which told himself to be a pilgrim in the paths of love.

A hot rain dropped on the pergola. The lamp-light struggled with some feeble fire-flies and quite obscured them, even as the tinsmith finally overpowered my wild Gromboolian chorus.



CARDINAL'S HAT.

CHAPTER XI

OLD HOUSES OF GROMBOOLIA

THE Stanghella music proved itself a delightful introduction to Gromboolian society, and many happy afternoons I spent in visits to these neighbours. Twice we went to tea with friends at Stanghella, who own a beautiful house and garden at the entrance to the little town. The garden is cultivated with extreme care and love, and from the burning heat and the dusty plain it was pleasant to enter the shady paths, to sit on a smooth, green lawn before a pile of ices, or run a race in small canoes upon the little sleepy lakes. Indeed that garden is a cool oasis, like the one at Vescovana.

But both are exceptions to the general rule of villas in Gromboolia ; and it is often sad to see how little property is respected or cared for nowadays in out-of-the-way corners of Italy. Browning's poem holds good ; and dear to the heart of modern Italian youth are the sounds of the piazza. But this is not all, and there are various other and more insurmountable barriers than those of boredom which drive the nobles into the towns.

Yet the ruins of greatness are there still—buried out there in the country. As the sphinxes stand by the Nile, so the gems of art and of gardening which once were the pride of their owners now fall aside, rot as flowers do upon their stalks, but still they stand. Even in Gromboolia, which strikes you as being a pure wilderness of wheat and maize, you need not go far afield. Oh, yes, you will easily find them : the little old villas smothered in weeds, or baring their breasts to the winter floods and mist. Scrape away the grass there on the doorstep, and you will see it is carved in no ordinary stone, but from a block of exquisite marble. And the glass has fallen from the window-frames, but the ironwork which masked it is there still, strangely and marvellously wrought, embossed perhaps with beaten roses, fretted with coats of arms. Grain and straw have been stored in the reception-rooms : they have scratched the faces of Venetian senators, or bruised the lovely limbs of

Aphrodite. But enough remains of these ghost frescoes to show you that they once were painted in colours bright and pure.

Then leave the house and push through the rotten reed fence into that place which long years ago they called the garden. It is a farmyard now, maybe, but the box will not be all quite dead which once made alleys, and the cupids and the fauns are there still, tumbled over without their pipes, without their arrows, in the grass where poppies and salvias wave above them, and the silly hens croon lazily.

Everything after all is here, and why complain. For which of us would change this desolation full of the dreams of "dear dead women."

When the present Government came in, property which had formerly been entailed, and therefore treated with love and veneration, was sold out. Strangers encamped in precious villas which already the finger of Decay had touched, owing to the wars and the consequent poverty of their owners. The strangers felt no pride in keeping up useless if lovely ruins. So long as the walls and roof were firm they were contented. Taxes are exorbitant. The land in itself proved labour and expense sufficient for them to meet. No law bound a hard-driven tenant, contentedly ignorant of the "Love of the Beautiful," to support the slender columns which tottered outside his door, or to replace a marble form which

only adorned and did not fatten his garden or his vines.

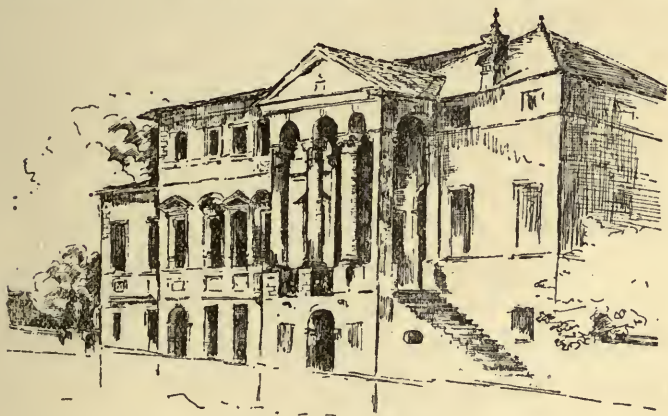
It is so easy for the passing tourist to criticise and to lament. I myself confess to harbouring the domineering spirit of a crusader in search of holy tombs when out in Gromboolia looking for her treasure.

One morning K. and I drove to l'Albera, a small hamlet lying some four miles from Vescovana. We had been advised to visit this place in order to behold the only tall tree of all Gromboolia. We went, and found the phenomenon—a tall poplar of uncertain age and undeniable beauty. For miles one sees this tree raising its head above the fields and hedgerows. Certainly it was a splendid creature, and its thousands of silver leaves shivered in the warm May air. But by its side we found something even more attractive—a thing which nobody had ever talked about, a buried jewel in a perfect setting. This was a villa built in such admirable style that it startled eyes accustomed to the interminable monotony of farms. The villa, as we afterwards learnt, belonged to the Manfredini, agents of the Este family, who owned this land in 1300, one century before the Pisanis purchased theirs. Lately the farming of it passed into the hands of Marchese Dolfin, of Rovigo. The house is like a miniature Venetian palace buried in Gromboolia instead of the lagune. Sumach-trees, cherries, and maize smothered its marble balustrades,

and swallows had built above its windows where the Manfredini lion ramped proudly on, regardless of the change in politics and life, rusty but magnificent in ironwork (see p. 127).

Delighted with the scene, I attempted at once to sketch it. Then the tenant farmer lounged out and entered into conversation with K. He was a tall and melancholy man, much thinner than the pointer dogs who followed him, and sadder still if that were possible. He had the manners of a misanthropic emperor. Had he lived in the days of Heliogabalus he would have flourished. I felt he might institute unhallowed farces at nights within the lonely little villa in hopes of some excitement, and then feel more weary than before. He waved his long hands sadly when we praised his dwelling. He took us in, and up the exquisite little staircases, all finished by some delicately-minded architect. He gave us odd sweet wine in his room, where Garibaldi's portrait hung alone among his guns. He tapped despairingly the tattered canvases which hung upon the entrance walls, treating Zeus, Juno, and the other gods with sadness and contempt. His type of melancholy is, I fancy, not so uncommon in the minds of those who live with ruined beauty. Yet I did not pity the misanthrope of the Manfredini villa. I believe him to be a privileged being, and in his own way, a happy one.

Then we discovered a second ruined palace, but one which was quite unlike the one by the poplar-tree. This second was a flourishing farm—Grompa. The fine palazzo shown below belonged to the Grompas of Padua, who kept their beautiful country house in excellent condition whilst they owned it. The last of the family was a general in the Venetian Republic. This gentleman, being possessed of a

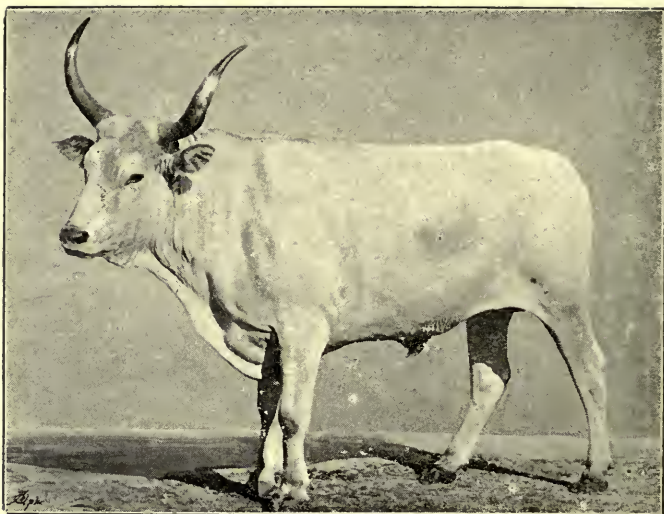


GROMPA, VILLA ESTENSE.

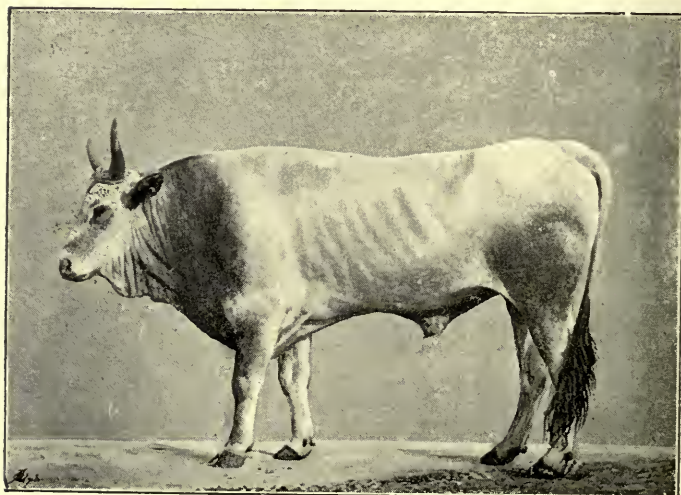
gambling spirit, soon dispatched his estate of Grompa, and sold the property to Princess Giovanelli, to whom it now belongs, and who lets it to Signor Marchiori of Lendinara. Signor Marchiori is a remarkable man. He has a singular love for his cattle and animals of every description. He has a beautiful English breed of pointers. His horses, his fowls, his silkworms, have a peculiar healthy happi-

ness about them, and as for the cattle, they would need a better description than I can give them. Indeed Grompa was an ideal farm. There seemed to be something human in all its beasts, and the two afternoons we spent there were times of extreme satisfaction.

The Marchiori breed of cattle is considered the best in the country. It is called "Pugliesi," having been brought originally from Apulia to the banks of the Po by members of the Grimani family, and now the breed is preserved at Lendinara by the Marchiori family. Some therefore came to Grompa with one of the Marchiori brothers. There were seven brothers, and they all fought, as boys, under Garibaldi. Our friend looks as though he had done that. He is magnificent in his huge felt hat and velvet coat; tall and straight, with the love of the past and the love of his land filling his eyes with light. He took us all over the house, which, though scarcely furnished, and used partly as a farm, is beautifully clean and tidy. In one of the top rooms there is a fresco showing the house of Grompa as it formerly existed, with many colonnades and nicely planned parterres. Most of these things have fallen away and vanished. Troops of ducks and hens run over the once cultivated garden, watch-dogs stretch where the statues stood, and vines are grown where once there were orange and fig trees. But nothing can



PRIZE OX OF SIGNOR MARCHIORI AT GROMPA



PRIZE BULL OF SIGNOR MARCHIORI AT GROMPA

alter the view of the plain from those high windows, or check the swallows and warm winds which play around them.

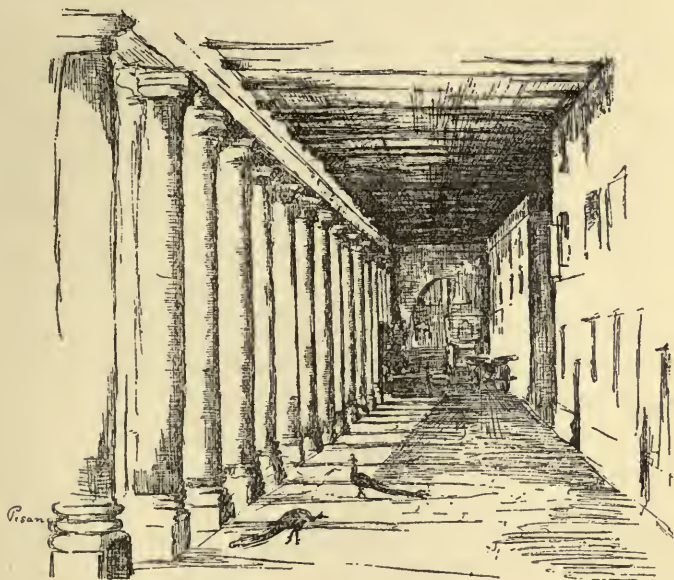
When we had seen the house we went into the orchard, and there the young calves ran to meet us when we called, as children would, kicking up their pretty feet and whisking with their tails. Then we entered the stables. Yes, they *were* beautiful, the Pugliesi cattle, and kind too, and well cared for. There was the prize bull. Such a bull! It was not the beauty of his points—I know too little about them—but his delightful character which charmed me. When his master spoke to him from the doorway he began to talk and rub his nose along the manger; his large eyes laughed with pleasure when the hand he loved caressed him.

When we left Grompa Signor Marchiori took from his walls the only portraits he possessed of his prize cattle, and insisted, with typical Italian courtesy, on his unknown guest accepting a gift which was of unique value to him. Now, however, I am glad to have accepted what in truth I did with no small sense of shame, for many others may realise the beauty of the Pugliesi cattle.

One day Madame Pisani took us to call on some of her tenant farmers at Boara Pisani, which is a small village built under the banks of the Adige. I was very glad to see this grand Pisani farm. The

house is long, and only two storeys high. Its great beauty consists in the row of almost colossal columns—thirty of them—which, rising from the basement, support the barns above the living rooms, and are strangely majestic and solemn for such a purpose. Indeed I imagine that only in Italy would splendours like these have been bestowed, even by an enthusiastic architect, on a mere farmhouse. Outside the arcades there is an orchard of cherry-trees. A troop of indolent peacocks swept about beneath their branches. The place was ill-kept, ragged, and romantic. The peacocks' tails supplied the only decorations to the sitting-rooms, and in the top bedrooms turkeys and hens reigned supreme. Yet nothing could alter the palatial repose of the great building. Its mistress, Signora Merlin, manifested a large indifference to appearances by her manner and her conversation. She was much too fat to worry over "systems" and their annoying details, and smiled passively upon all the Contessa's suggestions. We sat on a huge divan, all three in a row, drinking iced cherry brandy with sponge cake, and that visit over, we proceeded to pay another to the old mother of Signora Merlin, who lives in another farmhouse at Boara Pisani, and simply revels in "systems." Indeed Signora Merlin I. is a very remarkable woman. No one should leave the Doge's Farm without paying her a visit. She is colossal in build, weighing at

least twenty stone. She rarely sits still, and manages the whole of a large property, and embarks upon numerous hazardous law-suits, quite alone. Her cattle rival the cattle of the Contessa, but the two women mutually admire each other, and their friendly rivalry is pleasant to behold.



BARCHESSE, BOARA PISANI.

This spring I returned to Boara Pisani for the purpose of drawing its colonnades. All the peacocks had left the *barchesse* and gone out under the cherry-trees. I inquired of the nearest cowboy whether they could be induced to return and let me take their portraits. "Draw a peacock!" sniffed

the cowboy, with contempt. "Ah," he suddenly added, "there is a beautiful stuffed one in the house—newly stuffed at Rovigo, and *that* I will bring to you." He bounded off, and returned in triumph bearing in his arms the stiff, unnatural bird, which he placed in my foreground. How beautifully did that creature rear its wired head! I sketched it, and returned to my colonnades. Suddenly loud piercing screams of fury disturbed the general peaceful hum of the farm. The living peacock of Boara Pisani had wearied of cherries, and, returning to the *bar-chesse*, espied this gorgeous rival. Instant revenge arose in that peacock's heart, and with a fell swoop upon the triumph of Rovigo stuffing he tore it limb from limb. The sensations of myself and the cowboy may be imagined when the owners of the birds came out and viewed the havoc.

CHAPTER XII

FISHING IN GROMBOOLIA

THE Gromboolian fishing season begins in early June after the first hay is cut and the banks of the canals laid bare. On the day of the first fishing the sky was of a pale blue colour. Not a cloud, and very hot and still. As I passed through the gardens in the early morning the magnolia-trees sent forth a heavy fragrance, unrolling their big buds before the risen sun ; and the lilies and the dying roses drooped as the dew vanished from their petals: the dew which had refreshed them in the hours of night. The garden is about fourteen acres, and surrounded by a broad ditch or canal—very deep, and overgrown in parts by tamarisk-trees. Canals like these form a complicated network over the whole country, and are the only safeguard against the terrible inundations which threaten this low land in autumn and in spring. They are usually kept rather bare, but this one, running round a private garden, is peculiarly green,

and shaded by vegetation. Little recked that calm canal as I saw it then what would be its appearance an hour later. The scene was in all ways a peaceful



SCENE OF THE FISHING.

one. Small, tender water-weeds reared their heads amongst the lily stalks and flags ; and thin, green shining plants, most lovely to the eye, most fatal

probably to the air, caught at the slanting lights which played through manna-ash, acacia-hedge, and tamarisk, upon the quiet moat. These waters had not been disturbed for many months, and underneath the lilies the fish had grown fat and sleepy. This fact the fishermen knew, and this it was which so delighted them and all the household. For the general excitement was great. The butler, coachman, and the head-gardener, leaving inferior menials to perform their morning's work, stood amongst the grasses on the shore. It seemed incredible to these gentlemen that a "Signorina Inglese" should entertain such dangerous and low desires as to wish to enter the boat. "Whatever you do, don't move," they said sternly, as they put me in the "barca"—a long, flat-bottomed thing like a gondola, without any seat, and newly adorned with a heavy coating of pitch. It was pretty full of water, left there for the sake of the fish we were going to catch. Three peasants with bare legs manned it. My seat was on the only dry ledge in the whole conveyance.

We pushed off, and I witnessed a different mode of catching fish to any I had before conceived of.

Noise, sunlight, and absolute churning up of the waters formed the chief features of the sport. A three-cornered net, about four feet in diameter, was attached by a wooden pivot to a long pole, and lowered into the water by Tabarro, the head fisher-

man. His two companions, Warwar and Boreggio, had then to push our boat, with as much dexterity and speed as the crazy thing would permit of, towards the bank ; attach it by driving their oars or poles into the bottom of the canal ; then, seizing other poles with rounded ends, to beat and agitate the surrounding water with all possible noise and splashing. After the first experiment, the net was elevated, and found to be empty ; and so for several times in succession. The spectators had climbed into a large tamarisk-tree, whence they discharged a shower of advice to the fishermen, which, needless to say, was ignored by these gentlemen—kings of the hour. After several fruitless attempts to secure the treasures of the canal in the manner above described, our net arose from a bed of water-lilies, and, “Oh,” cried the occupants of the tamarisk-tree, “an eel, an eel, by Bacchus !” “An eel !” screamed the entranced head-gardener ; “but,” in a lower voice, “spare my nymphæas.”

It was a magnificent haul. Two mighty eels, three fatted tench, and a couple of luce were at once secured and thrown into the bottom of our boat. I cannot say that I shared the enthusiasm for the eels, or that I at all liked them. They came writhing along about our feet—long shining things, green like the weeds which had sheltered them. But the tench were beauties, round and fat, with delight-

ful pearly colours and flopping fins. Our first success was followed by many others, and as soon as we had induced that muddy canal to disgorge her living treasures in sufficient number they were gathered together and shoved into a great dry watering-can. The net was freed from branches and thorns, and its holes mended with string, for it had been rudely handled, what with the banging of the sticks and the shovelling in the mud. And then the banks were again attacked. Every minute the heat increased. One almost saw the wheat and Indian corn growing taller in the neighbouring fields. In the garden at our backs a bird would break forth at times in passionate song, or a dragon-fly meet, clashing with another in the air. Blue damozels—so blue the purest cobalt could not paint them—stayed quivering on some tender water-weed, and the feathery fluff of tamarisk seeds floated in air above the water and caught in the shore. But when we came dashing forward everything fled, and the light on the water changed to murky, almost to crimson, hues, whilst the smell of decayed vegetation was anything but sweet, increased by the rays of the unclouded sun. At last we found that this sun had climbed too high. A maid came by with a basket to carry the admired eels to the cook. They were stewed in wine, and we ate them at supper.

That was the fishing. My knowledge of the

sport in other lands is slight. I have lingered for hours along a glacier-stream, dead quiet with a rod, and held a line in the soulless Mediterranean and in the Cornish sea. One gurnard and a sardine form my record hitherto ; so I can safely recommend, as far as results go, this noisy go-a-fishing on an Italian plain, where in thirty minutes about two dozen large tench and eels were captured with all the excitement of a hunt, and amidst the beauties of the "waveless plain of Lombardy."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FESTA OF S. ANTONIO AT PADUA

“Il maravigliosa vasello dello Spirito Santo, S. Antonio da Padova, uno degli eletti discepoli e compagno di San Francesco il quale San Francesco chiamava suo vicario, una volta predicava in concistorio dinanzi al papa è ai cardinali. . . . Il papa, considerando e maravigliandosi della profondità delle sue parole, disse : Veramente costui è arca del testamento e armario della Scrittura divina.”—“FIORETTI DE SAN FRANCESCO.”

ON June 13th of the year 1231 a boy was born in Portugal. Later this boy became a monk, and entered the Franciscan order. Once, on a sea voyage, the ship in which he was sailing was borne by contrary winds upon the coasts of Italy. Here the boy, who was in fact S. Antonio, landed, and joined St. Francis of Assisi, who was then holding the first general chapter of his order. After that time S. Antonio worked, together with St. Francis, in the north of Italy. The manner in which his name is still worshipped forms a striking instance of the long-lived gratitude amongst the poorer classes. He lived but a very

short time in Padua, where he faced the dreaded tyrant, Eccelino da Romano. His life on earth was short indeed, but so strong was his influence, so firm his faith, and beautiful his character and works, that his memory is yet fresh and vivid in the minds of the people. It has been handed down through over six hundred years from father to son, and much of the present fame of Padua is owing to the presence in it, all those centuries ago, of an obscure Portuguese friar.

In what light and lovely language has the biographer of S. Francesco told of the doings or Padua's saint in his "Fioretti"! It were impossible to re-tell that simple but altogether fascinating tale of S. Antonio preaching to the fishes in the sea at Rimini.

S. Antonio died in his thirty-seventh year, and a short while afterwards he was canonised, and the great church at Padua was begun and dedicated to the new saint.

This splendid monument, with its minarets and domes, which inevitably suggest an Eastern city, is familiar to most travellers in Northern Italy. The angelic babies, worked by Donatello in bronze panels around its high altar, the patron beasts of the four evangelists below the choir wrought by the same master, and many gems of early Paduan painting and sculpture within the Santo, draw the art student

and the tourist hither in spring and autumn. An endless multitude of the devout press daily towards the tomb of their favourite saint, and, kneeling beside the solid marble slab, press their foreheads or draw their hands across the stone which covers his remains, and which is said to possess marvellous powers of healing both for sorrows and disease.

The chapel of the Santo is on the left side of the church. Scores of silver lamps hang by silver chains from its ceiling. Tall silver candlesticks rise up from the altar steps to meet them ; festoons of silver hearts are garlanded above. The walls are covered with marble ; big jars stand full of lilies, and incense and sweet oil burn here day and night. There is a white shimmer and a fragrance about this place which is very beautiful and quiet. The walls and steps and arches are covered with wonderful carvings by the brothers Lombardi. Big garlands of fruit and flowers surround the panels in low relief, representing all the miracles of the saint. Here is S. Antonio disclosing the whereabouts of a miser's heart : "His heart is in his treasure chest," said the saint in one of the legends, and there the relations are finding it, whilst others seek it in vain in the side of the dead man. And there the sceptical soldier has cast his glass cup upon a stone pavement, to try the truth of the monk's words. The pavement is cracked open, but the glass remains intact,

and the young man looks over the window-ledge amazed but believing.

The same devotion throbs in the hearts of the people in our nineteenth century as throbbed there six hundred years ago. Call it custom, or love of a crowd, or desire to sit in a merry-go-round as you will, this fact remains that as day dawns on the 13th of June, the people from all the surrounding country begin to move towards the city with one accord. Mountain men and women, too, will tramp on foot some two or three days' journey, walking from their shady hills in the heat of June to visit the city upon the plain which holds the tomb of their saint. The strange costumes, the sunburnt, eager faces of these people crowding around the shrines in the Duomo, falling in weary attitudes upon the altar steps, form perhaps the most impressive sight on this remarkable day.

It was with a feeling of real joy that on June 13, 1892, I, too, found myself upon the road to Padua. I wrote a description of what I saw at the time and give it here.

We were called at 6.15, and opening my eyes I saw a leaden sky outside my windows, whilst the general stickiness of every object within my room made me aware that another of the dog days, or Gromboolian scirocco, had dawned upon us. We breakfasted and drove off to the station of Stanghella

—a party of four. My friend L. had come up from Florence a few days before on purpose to perform this pilgrimage. She and I wore large sun hats and cotton gowns, but our chaperones F. and M. shone superior in Parisian bonnets and most elegant silk cloaks. Arrived in the station of Stanghella we found a great crowd, and were advised by the telegraphist, the stationmaster, the *sindaco*, and other gentlemen who had won our friendship by a serenade the preceding evening, to travel to Padua by the ordinary omnibus train, and let the specials go by. We did very well in following their advice, as the “specials” were a moving mass of pilgrims, and the heat was great. The *capo-stazione* told us that over fifty thousand people would travel into Padua by train alone this day. At about 8.40 we got into our train and started towards the holy city—for as such I shall for ever retain its image stamped upon my brain. We steamed through fields where the corn stood tall, and already deeply gilded, then through the hills, sleeping in dead heat, and lastly into Padua. Our train was an omnibus of omnibuses, and we literally dragged across the sunny country. Arrived in Padua I was impressed by the sense of moving humanity in a manner I have never before and may never again experience—a variegated throng of men, women, and children passing in procession through the narrow streets.

Every road was crowded, and as for a cab neither love nor money could procure the article ; but we found a closed trap belonging to the Stella d'Oro, the driver of which volunteered to take us into the city. Through the dust and the *popolo* we accordingly rattled. Everything and everybody was pressing towards the church of the Santo. Horses, donkeys, mules in hundreds were being led or ridden or driven towards the "Fiera," which takes place a little beyond the cathedral. (A fair and a horse-market are held, together with the saint's birthday.) It would be impossible to describe the extraordinary multitude. The strange thing was that men, beasts, and carts, though hopelessly intermingled, maintained their course in quiet and unexcited deportment. We deposited our wraps at the inn to which we had of necessity been brought, and I could not help remembering my last arrival there with the Teolian clown and the apocalypse horse ; then by some lucky chance we procured a cab to take us to the Santo.

The piazza round the cathedral was crowded with small booths, where rosaries, portraits of the saints, lovely marble images, and every sort of holy ware was to be purchased. S. Antonio is a very fascinating personality, and there were trays and baskets full of his miniature figure carved in white or black bone with a hole through the headgear for a ring—objects which even a bigoted heretic might feel

inclined to purchase promptly. I connect his image with the brown necks of small Gromboolian boys and girls. Tied with a bit of cord, he reposes there throughout their childhood, and is disclosed even through the open shirt of aged cowherds, or of sad and withered crones. We stayed to buy some of these objects, then we passed into the church.

The first impression was that of entering a Turkish bath. The winter chill of that great mosque had been driven up into its topmost cupolas. One knew somehow that a chill existed, but the main body was bathed in the breathings of a million people. We at once pushed into the thick of the huge throng, and although the atmosphere was stifling I somehow found it strangely congenial—fitted to all the sounds and sights around. Hundreds and thousands of men and women here were gathered together. They knelt in corners, they stood or sat on wicker chairs, they moved in slow procession round the shrines. Strange portraits of dead men slept on in their marble niches. Large-eyed madonnas and gilded saints smiled down from frescoed walls. Incense poured out from the immense congregation of priests in the choir, and above the whole there rose and swelled a mighty music: "*La messa cantata.*" Here were boys wailing, penetrating voices, men's basses, and the pathetic strains of violins flooded with the roll of two great organs. In every side chapel a mass

was being celebrated at the same moment as the high mass.

Never have I seen such wealth of shining silver, white lilies, embroidered and embossed priests' vestments, or such undeniable devotion, as that which filled the church of the Santo at Padua on June 13, 1892, and all for the love of a small dead man. It is, however, impossible to convey on paper the impression left upon one by that singular scene.

We at last sat down at the back of the high altar and listened to the mass. Then we went on again round the church. I had never been in a crowd before, but was now to experience its possibilities, for I somehow got caught up and submerged in the main current, which was moving the round of the shrines. I was entirely lifted off my feet and found myself gently but surely carried forward by a party of the hottest, best-mannered, and most curious set of mountaineers it has ever been my luck to meet. The women wore brilliant satin stays ; great garnets glistened in strings upon their necks. The men's jackets were short and stiff—brown, green, and yellow colours set off their splendid sunburn. I was compelled to let them take away my chair, in which I had got hopelessly entangled. It was passed over the heads of the crowd, and I drifted steadily forward.

At last I rejoined my companions in an open space.

The owners of Parisian bonnets had had enough of such experiences. I suppose the thermometer might have stood at 98° or 100° Fahr. I do not know, nor had I any desire to calculate. L. and I left our companions at a side-door, and recommenced our pilgrimage. To our great delight we encountered a friend in the crowd—Signor Merlin. “*Che occasione,*” he cried, “*per lei*”; and evidently immensely pleased himself, he took us under his care, and behind his tall form we walked at ease. We made the entire round of the Santo, stopping to see the shrines, and even passing up with the multitude to the tomb of the saint, to draw our hands along the marble slab where thousands drew theirs for a blessing. Then we came back to the gates of the choir. The mass had just then ended. We waited to see the bishop and his priests pass into the sacristy. The Bishop of Padua is tall and very young for his position. There was a great dignity and simplicity about him. The tall, white mitres of his companions formed absolutely perfect pictures against the wood-work and stone pillars.

We then rejoined the Parisian bonnets, who were sick of their prolonged devotions and rated us soundly for our lengthy absence. We returned to the Stella d'Oro and ordered a lunch in the large cool dining-room; rice and Wiener Schnitzel, strawberries and beer. The meal was not unpleasant, but

the intense heat scarcely produced an appetite, though it exacted a siesta in which we did not hesitate to indulge from the hours of one to three. After that we once more started forth into the Paduan streets. Of course we went to the Café Pedrocchi and drank coffee, and stewed. Pedrocchi was about as crowded as the Duomo, only here students were added to the peasant throng. Also we "did" the Salone Municipiale and the church of Sta. Giustina. And after that we took a header into the fair.

Here were merry-go-rounds by the dozen, shows, menageries, booths, and horses. In fact that terrible thing—a mass of mankind paying to be amused. In their midst the tall white poplar-trees in the Prà della Valle rose calm against a cloudless sky, and grotesque senators and prophets gazed into the waters at their feet with a marble indifference to the maddening dust and hubbub all around them.

We, too, panted for one instant's shade, one minute's calm repose. And this was found at once within the gates of those famous botanical gardens—mother of every botanical garden in Europe. Here under huge flowering tulip-trees, across grass paths, and by still ponds where lotus leaves were growing, we wandered for some happy moments. The yellow Alpine foxglove was growing there in great beauty, and a flaming allspice, which I have never seen



THE SCENE OF THE HORSE-RACING AT PADUA

before, scented the whole air of the garden. Above the trees rose the domes of the Santo, pearly things against a faint blue sky. I think the ordinary trees, the flowers, and water had gained for me nearly double their accustomed sweetness; but there was no time to linger in their midst. We hurried back into the heart of the fair, and soon were in the very thick of the horse-market, where, surrounded by galloping steeds, the Parisian bonnets were driven quite distracted, and L. and I snorted with delight. A delicious havoc reigned in that piazza. Young horses flew round and round in narrow circles, ridden bare-backed or encouraged by the bystanders; small curricles dashed through the throng, and promiscuous groups of ponies kicked out at intervals as their companions passed them.

We walked on through the whole fair. The streets of Padua were transfigured by a double row of booths. Here were displayed, and here we bought, entrancing objects: copper pails and fans and marble fruits which imitate to marvellous accuracy their juicy prototypes (fruits which my æsthetic friends have scorned upon my writing-table). Weighed down with all these purchases, and conscious of further fatigue ahead, some members of our party began to lag. There are few things more fatiguing than the sight of hundreds of fatigued people at the end of a long day. It was

with immense relief that we again found ourselves in the Duomo at 6.30, took seats, sank down in them, and awaited the *processione*. That scene is the one which out of the whole day I remember best, so deeply did its beauty and calm impress me. It seemed a poem, to write of which in prose were pity.

The thousands now were ordered out in rows all up the body of the church from the west doors to the steps of the high altar. The low light of the setting sun streamed in upon them, gilding with its golden rays the heads of kneeling men and women. So tired were these people that they fell asleep in groups, leaning one against the other, and above the sleepers hundreds of others dreamily swung their fans.

Those paper fans of Padua ! never shall I forget the charm of them, as old men and young, women and little children, swung them through the Santo in the calm of vespers.

The sun went down behind the houses out in the piazza, and one young man's falsetto voice rose high above the organs and the choir. Hundreds of lights shone one by one over the altar and down the aisles.

Then the procession formed. It was a beautiful procession, unlike to any I have seen before. Each waxen candle was bound with branches of real

Madonna lilies. There must have been thousands of the glorious shining flowers borne round the church of the Santo on that evening. Small children scattered rose-leaves, and little boys staggered under the unbearable weight of their lily stalks as they preceded the relic of the saint, his face set in the most magnificent jewels. We saw the diamonds round the jaw glittering in the candle-light long before the relic passed us. Indeed it was the most lustrous point visible in the whole great crowded dome.

The procession moved round the church and out at the north door into the twilight of the piazza. The congregation arose from dreams and followed it.

We, too, had to go. It was eight o'clock. We drove to the station and caught the last train. I think we were tired. We sank down into the heated carriage, and were carried home to Vescovana across a black and sleepy country, lighted faintly by a summer sky. There was a mist and a marvel of fire-flies over the corn-fields, and the night on those broad plains seemed wonderfully full of rest.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HARVEST

ON the 19th of June the harvest began. The 20th or 25th are the dates usually appointed, but the crops were ripe, the weather fine. I think there was no single cloud in all the sky. For many days there had been a hush—a sort of feeling of expectancy through all the country which was golden as the sun itself. As we drove into the fields that first morning of the harvest I felt but a slight difference from other days, yet the great work of the Gromboolian year had begun, and from end to end of the vast plain small sickles were changing its entire aspect.

We drove into the property and found the men at work on the Dieci farm. They begin to work with the dawn—at three. It takes thirty men to cut a field, but the thirty will do twelve fields in a day, which means about fifteen English acres. They work in a long and slanting line—young men and old in white canvas clothes, with here and there a blue

shirt, now and then a more enormous grey felt hat. Slowly they seem to go, the round sickle taking the stalks almost tenderly, and leaving the cornflowers—intense patches of blue—amongst the stubble. There is a dead stillness about the country and about the work. You could scarcely believe, were you not informed of the fact, that hundreds of men over hundreds of miles were spending more bushels of human energy in this season than they would be called to use for the rest of the year. Sitting in some low ditch or uncut field, you would be puzzled by one single sound—a long low cry, as of a wailing spirit wandering somewhere in an immense and melancholy waste. This is the *A Basso*, which reminds those who know the East of the *muezzin*, or call to prayer, from mosques repeated through the day. Hear it once, see where it comes from, and all your life you will keep that saddening yet charming chord of Gromboolian melody within your ear, and it will bring back to your mind the scene of a Lombard harvest. As the men cut they have to stop at intervals to make a knot of straw wherewith at a later hour to bind the stacks, and it is the voice of the head reaper calling for this pause which makes the Gromboolian *muezzin*. All the reapers bend a little lower, then stand up and knot some heads of corn together, then go on again.

A long low line of golden corn half laid to the

ground and threaded through with a string of grey-blue men. Beyond, in an infinite perspective of pollard willow-trees, of Indian corn and wheat, the pale and slender campaniles of a distant village rising into the heated air like dreams. An opal midday light bathing the whole.

But you cannot describe in solid prose the absolute fulfilment of that scene—the entire blending of the hues, the bath of sunshine combined with deepest melancholy. Words and additional adjectives are no good whatever. Not even Millet could have put the thing on canvas. Air, sun-laden air with nothing to break or to disturb it, and a land where every inch is known to be cultivated by the hand of man, lying as though quite undisturbed in the cradle of its Creator.

Only the wail of the *A Basso* and the small faint brush of the sickle. Sitting in the quiet loggia of the villa during the hours of work, rising at dawn to peer through shuttered windows, I have heard that cry arise from all the country round—from near the gates to far—oh, far beyond the banks of the Adige. It penetrates above the song of birds, the buzz of crickets, or the rustling wind, and tells the listener that if he is sitting idle, a great concourse of men is working there unseen amongst the fields.

At midday there is a pause. At three they begin again, and work till four, then on again till seven.

In the afternoon the women appear upon the scene, which at once becomes more varied and more lively. These ladies have nothing to do with the reaping or the stacking. Their main object is gleaning. Gleaning is a pure, unmitigated passion. It is in the heart of these people—their very souls seem bound up in it. Family cares, if they exist, are forgotten. Non-existent, they are arranged for during the courtship which the occasion makes possible.

A woman can glean a franc's worth of corn in the day if she works hard enough. This being the season of courtship, the girl who has gleaned most during the period is the most admired and sought after in marriage. She hangs all her gains out over her window or upon her parents' thatched roof—each little hut is covered with corn during this season—and thus the world measures her worth. I must add that a strong voice and a stalwart ankle are also admired in the stubble field.

There is a peculiar red which these young women know how to wear—a red as of crushed pomegranate seeds—a harmony of yellow and of crimson with a splash of blue. They use it for their aprons; otherwise a happy monotony is shown in their attire. The faultless white canvas shirt, slouched a little over the shoulders, and short sleeve open wide at the elbow; over this the cotton bodice of white, or

brown, or blue, laced at the back and gathered tight above the breast, giving a peculiarly abundant beauty to the figure (and I must note that the more these bodices gape at the back, the greater the fashion of the wearer). Then the short petticoat of thicker cotton, nearly always a dull dark blue, and the bare brown legs and feet. A flapping Lombard hat, with a new ribbon round its crown, a flower in their hair, an extra dash of grease upon their forelocks—nothing beyond to mark the height of the “season.”

You will see these daughters of the soil—shoals of them—apparently crawling, but in truth tearing along the narrow edge of grass which lines the road. They are empresses for the time. They hold themselves like queens, though for the most part their figures are short and square. They press against the gates and hedges, clamouring for the rights which were accorded to them from the time of Ruth and long before her epoch.

It is the men who do all the hard work of reaping and stacking, then come the gleaners, and the next day, if possible, the oxen drag the plough. Thus in a space of thirty-six hours a waving field of corn has become a tumbled heap of muddy clods, and the whole aspect of the country changed.

Having spoken of the men and women, I must now tell of the oxen, who after all deserve most praise. Let it be remembered that it is they who

yearly turn every sod in the Italian plains and hills and valley! Those calm white beasts, with eyes more beautiful than the eyes of women, and tempers which never ruffle! All through the hottest season they have to work. In winter, if their owners are poor, they often starve, and in the Dog Days they must pull the plough through soil whose richness forms the joy of its owners, and therefore their despair.

But as I have shown in another chapter, the life of oxen on the Doge's Farm is made as smooth and bright as possible, and to see them at their work is a pleasure to be enjoyed without reservation. After the first day of reaping we drove out to see the first field ploughed. Long low shadows lay over the stubble from the willow-trees to the west. But in a belt of sunlight the oxen moved along, a team of eight—four on the stubble, four in the sods—pulling the plough through a depth of thirty centimetres. One man held the plough, another walked at the heads of the first couple, and a small boy with a long willow wand patronised the entire team: “*Hoa Petrarca, Ai Magnifico, Stai Plon Plon.*” In answer to which familiar names the great creatures would slightly move their heads, then lumber on—dreadfully slow, absolutely calm, and dignified beyond description.

I am sure they knew it, those milk-white beasts, how deeply the soil required their labour. Shaking

and lifting their delicate necks beneath the yoke, the "dinanze" go—always the elegant ones in front, the young ladies just come out. Then the "squinzaglio"—those more accustomed to the plough—followed by the "sottopeso"—usually a couple of the elder oxen, and lastly the bull and his fellow, "Il Timon."

To fully realise the splendour of any cattle you should see a Gromboolian bull moving in front of the plough. He gives you to understand that it is no sort of trouble for him, but only a great condescension for his broad hoofs and mighty flanks to move across the sods. He is always adorned by metal coverings to his horns, which shine like burnished silver, and he is massive and regal in appearance.

This party of eight go up and down the field which so few hours before was a land of waving corn. By night you will not recognise the place, and the young moon will see dull patches of earth where her mother had so lately smiled on shining crops. The same crop will be sown in the same field next year, and indeed for four years in succession. At this fact the British farmer may well open his mouth in horror. The soil goes to a depth of forty to fifty centimetres, when it usually becomes a swamp. Nature's hands have formed it more than men's labour. It looks like clay, but is in fact composed of the silting up of rivers, the beds of time-old lakes, and the century-long droppings of a marshy vegetation.

CHAPTER XV

GLEANING

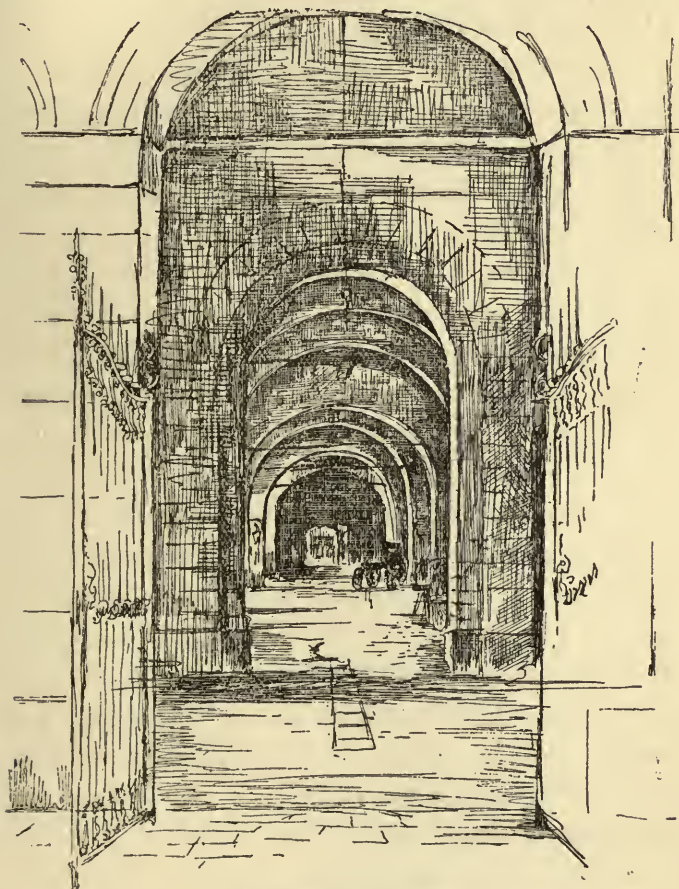
GLEANING, as I have already stated, is the people's passion. When the corn is stacked (and it appears to me that it is the interest of the reapers to leave a considerable amount upon the ground for the sake of their wives and daughters, their lovers or acquaintance) the news is spread that in that field there will be gleaning at such and such an hour. If the property is large the crowd which gathers outside its gates will be proportionately big, and not only the women of the country, but also their rivals from the neighbouring villages, will put in appearance. I shall not easily forget the tone of mingled scorn and pride with which a small girl answered my inquiries about a band of remarkably charming young women who were evidently not of her company. "Those!" she exclaimed, with a shrug; "oh, they come from a great distance. They are *forestieri*." "And where do they come from?" "From

Granze," was the answer—a hamlet lying one mile from Vescovana.

Sunday is the day on which to see the gleaning to advantage; for then the men join too in the pastime, or at least come and look on at it, and there is a general feeling of bacchanalian carouse in the stubble field.

One Sunday evening we returned late from our drive about the estate. It was eight o'clock. The sun was touching the horizon and casting back long shafts of golden light such as I have attempted to describe elsewhere. The gold dust rose above the crowd which awaited our arrival outside the gates of the "Dodici," of whose owner it is the somewhat tyrannical practice to control the hours of gleaning to suit the pleasures of herself and of her guests. We will hope that the waiting adds to the fun. Anyhow I was the favoured mortal on this occasion for whom some eight hundred busy people had been kept waiting through a tedious summer afternoon. Gromboolians have long powers of endurance, otherwise I should have felt even more humiliated by the situation than I did. For a "Signorina Inglese," whose driving powers are not exactly satisfactory in her own eyes, whose companion, the head coachman, desires her to show both himself, herself, and the horse to advantage, whilst leading the way across a stubble field before an impatient throng of critical natives, is not altogether

a person to be envied. She must hear it discussed not only why she is interested in their affairs, or if she



BARCHESSA, VESCOVANA.

can manage her horse, but also whether her nose be long or short, her looks good or ill. She must, in

fact, be considered as the puppet which her whole British nature recoils from, because her distinguished foreign predecessors have been this before her. There is something to be said for the fact that our race is termed "matta" in Italy. Madness may cover a multitude of innocent offences, and under cover of it I indulged my harmless desires, such as myself joining the gleaners and conversing with them freely.

The procession moved forward : the Calais-Douvre in front, the gig following, the multitude behind, a large greyhound and several sheep-dogs barking in the rear ; whilst the bailiffs walked in front, bearing, with a sort of potential air, their big clubs—signs of superior social standing.

The corn is piled in stacks of sixteen bundles in a line all up the centre of the field. The effect produced is like that of a yellow lake with a line of big ships sailing down it. Round its shores in crowded lines the gleaners stood. There was a dead hush. The golden light lingered about their heads and yellowed all their shirts, then caught the willow-trees, and lighted on the piles of corn. But at their feet the shadows grew to blackness.

Then the word was given.

There was a rush, a stampede as of cavalry, and the surface of that yellow lake was ruffled over with a tempest of brown feet ; brown arms caught up the



Photo by Mr. Walter Leaf

IN THE HARVEST FIELDS AT VESCOVANA

golden straw, piling it in bundles. Up flew the dust over those hundreds of brown heads. All backs were bent, and gradually submerged in piles of straw.

From the box or my gig I looked down over some eighty acres of stubble, absolutely alive with flapping hats, white shirts, and bare brown arms.

The air was electric ; the sun had set, but some reflected light came back to gild the top of every object. Infected with the general spirit, I plunged amongst the gleaners and found myself clawing along the ground in company with the sexton.

Night darkened over this strange scene, and a red light flushed the western heavens. That night we read the Book of Ruth together, instead of stealing out upon the balcony. More than three thousand years ago that tale of harvest had been told, in language wonderfully clear and pure and simple, of the young Jewish woman who gleaned among the stubble. Strangely the story thrilled us, for it seemed the world was just as young to-day as then, and Ruth might still go gleaning after the reapers in the fields of Boaz.

Another night there was a fire on the estate. I find a full description of it in one of my letters from which I now quote. A Gromboolian fire was interesting, and rather dramatic.

“ We settled down to dinner at about nine. It

was a dead hot evening. Suddenly a murmur arose and swelled through the house, and Morato rushed in with the news that one of the farms was on fire—might the bells be rung? We ran up to the top of the house, and in the quiet evening light we saw a red glare arise towards the Adige. The general excitement was tremendous: the church bells began to be hammered on in a peculiarly horrid manner; the butler petitioned to go with the pumps; the cook finished serving the dinner; A. scolded and flopped his sleeves, and soon every one was off, and Madame Pisani and I packed into the closed carriage, still heavy with midday heat, and crowded with gutta-percha pails. As we shut the window I saw the young moon through its glass. The horses tore off and arrived near the scene of the disaster. There was a considerable crowd of people—all the Contessa's men and bailiffs with crowds of gleaners. No one was doing anything. Morato had brought the wrong screw for the pumps, and the pumps were being pulled at a leisurely pace by a pair of oxen. The sparks flew in cascades from the burning house, all around was dead still, the earth black and the sky pale lemon in the west. Morato went back for the screw; we waited and heard the dismal tale. The house was let by Madame Pisani to a carter, who, against her advice, had admitted some families for the gleaning season. One of these was composed of three small

children (the youngest only three months). The mother, in her gleaner's madness, had locked them into an upper room together with all her gleanings, and gone off herself to the fields. In that room the fire naturally broke out, but luckily a young man passing by saw the smoke and was able to climb into the room and rescue the half-suffocated children.

When the proper screw at length arrived the pump was put into the ditch and began to work. Then the Contessa descended from her barouche, and I shall never forget the extraordinary scene which ensued. With her gorgeous evening dress held up over a yet more gorgeous petticoat she swept into the crowd and addressed it collectively and individually. There was certainly a fecklessness of purpose about the proceedings, and the bailiffs issued orders which they should themselves have performed. She denounced the men, and threatening them with a lengthy ladder which she tore from a neighbouring tree, commanded them to work, with the result that one youth more desperate and anxious to please than the rest jumped into the centre of the burning house with the hose, and Madame Pisani scrambled after him, passionately rebuking him for his folly. She then manipulated the syringe herself with about twenty of the natives holding up the hose behind, the sparks flying all around, beams falling, and a general scene of glare, confusion, pumps, and

people in the midst of the most wonderfully lovely and restful midsummer night that I (alas ! an 'Unemployed') have ever known. All around the millions of frogs sang on, their monotonous guttural voices mixing strangely with the discordant sounds of man. And above there was such a heaven of quiet and indifferent stars !

We were not home till near upon eleven, but we left the thing pretty well extinct—everything burnt save four bare walls.

CHAPTER XVI

THRESHING

A SLIGHT pause followed upon the fury of reaping and gleaning : then came the threshing, which last was the cause of indescribable excitement and concern in Gromboolia. The threshing-machines have their winter quarters under the arcades of the Doge's Farm. There the unwieldy beasts may be said to hybernate during eleven months of the year. At the end of June, when every crop has been laid low, they are brought out and dragged across country to perform their important offices.

An imperial triumph—an entry of the Cæsars into Rome—could scarcely have excited more proportionate attention than that of the arrival of “La Macchina” at a farm in Gromboolia. The farm had been duly arranged and prepared. Its inhabitants had a sense that the dignity and importance of events about to be performed on its premises was such that they must put on their best clothes and

display their finest copper. The threshing-floor was weeded, scraped, and re-scraped ; the sacks laid out in order ; lions rampant and ducal coronets put to the front.

There are two machines on the Doge's Farm. The one of latest date is the admiration and envy of the whole Gromboolian universe, and the great black monster is undeniably an impressive sight. He needs at least twelve oxen to draw him. Each machine has his keeper and his groom. It were impossible to overestimate the importance of these gentlemen who appear upon the scenes for one week out of the fifty-six, and during that period boss the entire show. The keepers are men of education and intellect, and one of them—a Venetian—adds to these other charms beauty and a great conceit. It is their office to see that their machines are in good working order, and well greased by their grooms. Beyond this they are careful to perform no work or any sort. I formed their acquaintance and found their conversation polished and delightful. The beautiful Venetian first mounted me upon his charge and then exposed to me all the details of her entrails, stroking her iron flanks as though she were some beast of breeding and great beauty. “Roostun—propria Roostun—roba inglese,” he announced, with vast complacency. Mr. Ruston ought to visit Gromboolia ; he would meet with a royal reception.

We drove out late one evening to witness the arrival of the threshing-machine at the Pioppa, which was the first farm where it was to work. For many weeks there had been a stir and a clash of iron and shuffling of tarpaulin under the *barchesse*. On the 30th of June the hybernators were to see light. The scene was impressive. We took our stand at the gates of the Pioppa. After some waiting a rumbling noise as of distant thunder announced the approach of Leviathan. Our beautiful white friends then appeared in the lane, waving the red tassels from off their spreading horns. Behind them trundled pompously the unwieldy monster who was to swallow up the fruits of all their months of labour. The oxen knew exactly what they were about, and how dignified and superior they looked and how it was their beautiful big eyes which fascinated us, and not the smoky funnel which they dragged. The procession moved into the property, and the next morning at daybreak the work of threshing began.

Leviathan had long hours of work—"from dawn to dewy eve" he laboured. The natives have surmounted their first prejudice of his claws, and flock most gladly round his flanks, stuffing his never-satiated mouth with the golden sheaves. The women scrape the chaff on to low stretchers, which small boys carry, running to the barn doors on bare

feet. The young men make long pyramids of straw, which they impale on endless poles and carry above their heads in triumph to swell the stacks the older men are building in acacia groves.

It is then that Gromboolians sing. It is not love songs which their minds create, but an impassioned praise of their own powers in stacking and impaling straw. I tried to secure the words on paper, but they were fleeting, and the threads of those rambling odes were not lightly to be wound by my uneducated fingers.

There is a buzz, a throb, a sense of concentrated life and animation during the work hours of Leviathan. Every day we visited those farms where he was working. We sat on chairs outside the farm door, in the intensest heat. We became half hypnotised—fascinated by the spectacle of so much life and labour in one single corner of the plain.

A sea of golden grain ; a throng of brown arms and legs and canvas shirts moving amongst the waves of yellow straw, and lines of bulging sacks. A whirr of leather straps, a panting fire-engine, a rush of sheaves, and above, for miles in the quiet sky, the floating away of chaff and thistle-down.

The machines travelled from one farm to another in a very short space of time, considering the herculean labours they performed. When they left the grain was gathered into sacks, packed on to carts,



Photo by Mr. Walter Leaf

A GROMBOOLIAN PEASANT GIRL



Photo by Mr. Walter Leaf

CANOTTO—A PORTRAIT

and taken to Vescovana. In the late evening the young men come from their work and carry the sacks up to the granaries. This is the hardest labour of the year. The sacks are very heavy, weighing from 50 to 72 kilos each, and it requires both strength and agility to hoist them on the shoulders and run up the precipitous brick steps into the barns. The work is well paid. A man can even earn five francs in a single evening by straining his muscles considerably, and it is the young giants of Gromboolia who compete and rejoice in the process. They strip themselves of all possible clothing, and if Michelangelo were to see them he might glory in the grand display of human muscle. The low red light of the setting sun streams into the *barchesse*, flooding the carts with the golden grain, the sacks, the dust, and large lithe figures of the men.

The beautiful Canotto excelled at this work. His extreme vanity led him to carry two sacks at a time, singing loudly all the time. Canotto was a splendid creature—a prize specimen of Gromboolian humanity—and he knew it. He stood about 6 ft. 3 in. on his bare feet. A fiendish joy in his life and his beauty played for ever through his eyes. He had passed his military service in the *cuirassière* because of his size and strength. L. photographed him one morning reaping. When the print arrived I told

Canotto of it, imparting the news to him one evening as we drove through some fields in front of the gleaners. "E molto bello," I said to the smiling Adonis (meaning, of course, the plate). "Ah," he answered me blandly, smiling, "you see I *am* very beautiful." Then he seized the prettiest girls by the hands and rushed with them across the stubble into the sunset—three superb specimens of this Southern humanity—awfully regardless of those austere qualities in human life which haunt for ever the brow of the mountaineer

CHAPTER XVII

A DAY AT TRISSINO

I WAS called at four, and arose unwillingly, not because I was sleepy, but merely dulled by the dreariness of dawn and with that peculiar hopelessness of self and of earthly or even heavenly comfort which inevitably enters the mind of one looking at that hour upon the lowlands.

Deny it or not as you will, I for my part must confess to a belief that Nature, like other beautiful ladies, has her moments or *déshabille* when she should not be contemplated too closely. Let her shake out those locks of hers, sodden and uncombed, clotted and draggled by the dews of night. Then, with the second kiss of her father, the sun, let her lovers go forth and embrace her.

There is, moreover, something uniquely depressing in a Paduan dawn: a certain close clamminess in the bent leaves of the camomile flowers dragging in mud along the road; and, in the drooping grass and dripping ribbons of the maize, a heavy melan-

choly. The sun arises hot and damp amid the soaking mists which encircle the horizon line. You scarcely see your god of day, but dead dull belts of crimson cross the western sky, and a faint, feverish blue vanishes above in the higher air, which is very chill. The peasant girls emerge from their mud huts, and creep sullenly between the hedges of Indian corn, shivering as their bare feet press the dew. Yet these are the same women who, some four hours later, will appear like goddesses gleaning on the sun-baked stubble fields. The farmers drive depressed and unstretched horses along the silent roads, sitting wrapped tight in fur-lined mantles—grim, grey men, who at midday will be cocking it over all the roost. No bird sings.

At five o'clock we drove amidst these things in the "Calais-Douvre" to the station of Stanghella, there got into the train and closed the windows, for fever haunted the mind of my companion, A., more than ever at this hour of the day, and no amount of camphor crystals or great-coats could make him happy. If any one desires to realise the birth of a summer day in Gromboolia let him enter one of its omnibus trains at five o'clock on a July morning, and be dragged across the plain at the rate of ten miles an hour. He will have every opportunity to note its progress. Be it confessed, I closed my eyes, but opened

them sometimes, and saw the disappearance of the mists and caught a vision of the Euganean Hills through which we passed. Then I looked again, and there was Padua. See Padua then and you will know her splendour. Her pearly domes, her pointed minarets, rose in an opal cluster as of sea-shells above the mulberry-trees—an Eastern city seen suddenly in the very heart of this Italian plain. Also the day had come: no dampness anywhere, nor sign of mist, but blue, clear, radiant blue above our heads, and an immense sun pouring mighty beams across Venetia.

At Padua one omnibus train was exchanged for another, and we started off towards the Monti Berici. The country seemed more scorched and dry in these parts than in Gromboolia. The acacia hedges were already tipped with orange, the ditches void of water, and naked stalks of water-lilies reared themselves from out the sun-baked mud. Blue mallows grew abundantly amongst the stubble, and the corn was stacked more in the English manner. Indeed, after about thirty miles of travel we experienced the delicious sensation of being in "foreign parts." We skirted along the foot of the Monti Berici—low wooded mountains all in miniature, with flecks of white and red where marble villas rose amidst dark alleys of cypress and of pine. Vicenza's tall red campanile—and in all

Italy there is none as rosy or as slender—shot up above Palladio's Sala as we neared the city. At the next station of Tavernelle we left the train, prepared to take a tram to Trissino. We were here told, however, by two drivers who clamoured for our patronage, that the *tramvai* would not start for another hour; so we were driven to charter the small but tidy gig and the least dismal horse of one of these gentlemen, and commenced a long drive up the Val d'Agno.

It was appallingly hot and dry. The country seemed absolutely denuded of clothes. The mulberry-trees were stripped bare for the silkworms, the corn cut, the fields abandoned, the Indian corn planted too late, and withered by the heat of July days. But as we slowly advanced into that broad valley matters began to change. Our road lay under the hill and through the present town of Montecchio. Above us the two skeleton towers of the old fortress stood like guardian eagles. Montecchio has a very pleasing situation on the last spurs of the Alps, and the young Romeo may have played within its walls and learnt a little of his love for nature from the beauty of the landscape all around him. The old fortress is now abandoned; the city wall shows like a torn rag upon the hillside. But there is a great charm about the present town, which consists of a single street—two lines of houses

running the round of the hill. The length of this street seems interminable. The houses are well built but ill kept. The massive corner-stones, the open portals, the bulging iron balconies all seemed dusty and asleep as we drove through. No creature stirred across the pavement to draw up water from those glorious wells, for wells are a great feature in Montecchio. I counted four of them along the winding street, huge hunks of marble heavily carved and worn by the interminable hauling up of buckets through generations in centuries past. They are now adorned by iron frameworks to facilitate the progress of the bucket strings in our nineteenth century.

We left the genial hills and crossed a line of straight fields, to wind once more amongst the mountains of Montecchio. And here we saw a sight new and, to me, most pleasant, namely, the Venetian sumach flowering in all its glory. Indeed the hill looked as though some flock of pink and yellow birds had passed it by, scattering their fluff across its sides. But instead of this it was the seeding-time of that delightful bush known to me hitherto only in gardens—old English garden books call it the wig-tree. Small pinks, campanulas, and many familiar herbs grew on those sunny slopes; and every minute the vegetation became denser, greener, more abundant. The fields

now were fields of hay; we smelt the scented pollen across the hedge. It is true that the river-bed was dry, but one knew fresh water had washed abundantly those whitening pebble stones and left its memory upon the meadow flowers.

We were now high up in the valley, and coming round a corner we saw Trissino—a small green hill, a bower of vines, of trees, of shrubs, and olives, from whose maze statues and palace fronts, brown homesteads and church towers, peered forth upon a billowy sea of green. For the foot of that hill at Trissino was lapped by meadows broad and shady full to the brim of yellow flowers and of hemlock heads innumerable. Long avenues of poplar were planted here amongst the grasses—planted by a wise man, who desired to make men amorous of his hill-town by drawing their eyes unconsciously through such sweet visions up to his palaces beyond. So cool, so green, so fresh and scented was this place, you desired to stretch limbs weary with the dust and travel, and rest for ever in those easy shallows. But instead of committing such a lazy folly we rattled on up the street of the town and entered the inn. “You can have nothing at all to eat,” said its inhospitable landlord; “we are not accustomed to *forestieri*. There is no meat in the house, neither can we procure any in the town.”

There are few things, perhaps, more painful to one's vanity than when absolutely enamoured of a new place to be treated as out of it—utter strangers with foreign tastes and needs. This fact



STEPS LEADING TO FRONT DOOR, TRISSINO.

certainly pained my companion more than myself. For had he not been born and bred in Trissino? Did not his family arms adorn the walls, and

were they not carved on every tomb within its church? My poor plea of having fasted since 4 a.m. was mean by comparison. "I will eat!" roared A. "At all costs I will eat! Son of your mother, do you understand me?" The landlord was duly impressed by this very simple appellation. He called together and abused all his womenkind, by which equally simple means a meal was evolved. During its preparation A. strode into the piazza and harangued the inhabitants, whilst I attempted a game of bowls below the mulberry-trees.

"Who was your father?" "In what condition were the money affairs of your grandmother when she died?" "Why are you so much uglier than your aunts?" and questions of the same penetration and politeness met my ears from the piazza. Then, "You can eat!" screeched the landlord from an upper window, and A. and I collided in our efforts to reach the doorway.

Silence followed as we took our stools in the cool dining-room of that unfrequented pothouse, and attacked the largest basin of *maccaroni con formaggio* ever perhaps offered to a coachman, a priest, and an English traveller. There were eggs, too, in a nice hard omelette, rare slices of salame in a piece of newspaper, cheese, and Trissino wine: "In viaggio si fa così," explained A., who had thrust

a certain new and unbecoming wideawake, which had come from Paris and greatly oppressed him, to the extreme back of his head, and was shovelling in the macaroni with ecstatic gusto.

After this meal we went out straight to see the town. It was nearly midday. It was the 7th of July, and the hour which can only be described as being absolutely shadeless. We walked up a steep winding road which leads to the villa and the church of Trissino. There were houses and cypress hedges on one side of our path, whilst the hill was supported on the other by high walls. These walls one scarcely saw. They were hidden by a hundred flowering shrubs, which, burying their roots in the shaded earth behind, burst in splendid bloom upon the heated street, there to please the passer-by, to ripen seed and seek for sun and rain and air. Here grew valerian white and red, shaded by pomegranates. Caper-flowers rushed down in white cascades ; a warm breeze played among their purple stamens. Small sedums, campanulas, and tiny ferns peered from the lower cracks, and roses and red honeysuckle fell from the cypress-trees above.

Here, indeed, was a wall garden which the wall gardener might weep in envy to behold, in impotence to rival.

Up and on we went. At intervals we caught

a glimpse of the garden we had come to see through a statue-guarded gate, or a bit of terrace gleamed white above our heads. Then when we reached the topmost gate we entered.

This villa at Trissino was one of the many possessions of Giangiorgio Trissino, a poet of the fifteenth century. For a description of Giorgio's life and work I here make some extracts from my father's "*History of the Italian Renaissance.*" He begins with a comparison between Trissino and Tasso :—

"Bernardo Tasso is the representative of a class which was common in Renaissance Italy, when courtiers and men of affairs devoted their leisure to study, and composed poetry upon scholastic principles. His epic failed precisely through the qualities for which he prized it. Less the product of inspiration than pedantic choice, it bore the taint of languor and unpardonable dulness. Giangiorgio Trissino, in the circumstances of his life no less than in the nature of his literary work, bears a striking resemblance to the Amadigi. The main difference between the two men is that Trissino adopted by preference the career of diplomacy into which poverty drove Tasso. He was born at Vicenza in 1478, of wealthy and noble ancestors, from whom he inherited vast estates. His mother was Cecilia, of the Bevilacqua family. During his boyhood Trissino enjoyed fewer

opportunities of study than usually fell to the lot of young Italian nobles. He spent his time in active exercises ; and it was only in 1506 that he began his education in earnest.

“Trissino's inclination towards literature induced him to settle at Milan, where he became a pupil of veteran Demetrius Calcondylas. He cultivated the society of learned men, collected MSS., and devoted himself to the study of Greek philosophy. From the first he showed the decided partiality for erudition which was destined to rule his future career. But scholars at that epoch, even though they might be men of princely fortune, had little chance of uninterrupted leisure. Trissino's estates gave him for a while as much trouble as poverty had brought on Tasso. Vicenza was allotted to the Empire in 1509 ; and afterwards, when the city gave itself to the Venetian Republic, Trissino's adherence to Maximilian's party cost him some months of exile in Germany, and the temporary confiscation of his property. Between 1510 and 1514, after his return from Germany, but before he made his peace with Venice, Trissino visited Ferrara, Florence, and Rome. These years determined his life as a man of letters. The tragedy of *Sofonisba*, which was written before 1515, won for its author a place among the foremost poets of the time. The same period decided his future as a courtier. Leo X.

sent him on a mission to Bavaria, and upon his return procured his pardon from the Republic of St. Mark. There is not much to be gained by following the intricate details of Trissino's public career. After Leo's death he was employed by Clement VII. and Paul III. He assisted at the coronation of Charles V., and on this occasion was made Knight and Count. Gradually he assumed the style of a finished courtier; and though he never took pay from his Papal or princely masters, no poet carried the art of adulation further.

"This self-subjection to the annoyances and indignities of Court life is all the more remarkable because Trissino continued to live like a great noble. When he travelled he was followed by a retinue of servants. A chaplain attended him for the celebration of Mass. His litter was furnished with silver plate, and with all the conveniences of a magnificent household. His own cook went before, with couriers, to prepare his table; and the equipage included a train of sumpter mules and serving-men in livery. At home in his palace at Vicenza, or among his numerous villas, he showed no less magnificence. Upon the building of one country house at Cricoli, which he designed himself, and surrounded with the loveliest Italian gardens, enormous sums were spent; and when the structure was completed he opened it to noble friends, who lived with him at large and formed

an academy, called after him La Trissiniana. Trissino was, moreover, a diligent student and a lover of solitude. He spent many years of his life upon the island of Murano, in a villa secluded from the world, and open to none but a few guests of similar tastes. Yet in spite of the advantages which fortune gave him, in spite of his studious habits, he could not resist the attraction which Courts at that epoch exercised over men of birth and breeding throughout Europe. He was for ever returning to Rome, although he expressed the deepest horror for the corruptions of that sinful city. No sooner had he established himself in quiet among the woods and streams of the Vicentine lowlands, or upon the breast of the Venetian lagunes, than the hankering to shine before a Prince came over him, and he resumed his march to Ferrara, or made his bow once more in the Vatican.

“The end of Trissino’s life was troubled by a quarrel with his son Giulio, in which it is difficult to decide whether the father or the son is most to blame. . . . Whatever may have been the crimes of Giulio against his father, Trissino used a cruel and unpardonable revenge upon his elder son. Not content with blackening his character under the name of Agrilupo in the *Italia Liberata*, he wrote a codicil to his will, in which he brought against Giulio the most dangerous charge it was then possible to make.

He disinherited him with a curse, and accused him of Lutheran heresy. It was clearly his father's intention to hand his son down to an immortality of shame in his great poem, to ruin him in his temporal affairs, and to deprive him of his ecclesiastical privileges. Posterity has defeated his purpose, for few indeed are the readers of Trissino's *Italia Liberata*."

I have quoted thus at length, for it strikes me that the character and work of Giorgio are strangely in accord with his gardens at Trissino—anxious imitations of a dead art. The rococo statues round the ponds resemble their Greek ancestors as little as Giorgio's *Italia Liberata* did the great epic of Homer. Yet they both have charm. And I think that the poet-courtier of the Renaissance, with his fine carriages, his learned friends, his chaplain and his cooks, must have visited this villa as well as the one at Cricoli, or on the island of Murano. After a lapse of four whole centuries some trace still lingers of their passage. One feels their footsteps on the sunny terraces. Court scandals hover, together with imitation classics, under the cedars of Lebanon and through the hornbeam alleys.

A. and I waited long for the villa gates to be opened. Then we entered the garden, and an odd impression seized me that we were in an artificial landscape. This was owing to the fact that the real hill had been banked up in order to form a flat piece

of ground for the house, and all its angles had been smoothed away and adapted to the use of man by man's hand. On the back terrace there were beds of flaming zinnias ; whilst under the northern wall there was a shimmer like moonlight over blue hydrangea blossoms.

The house in itself is only one long, narrow line of building, with one small wing containing a single room at either end. All the windows open upon the front. There appear to be no passages, and the arrangements must be distracting when the lady of Trissino entertains a house-party. The front of the house is encompassed by a high balcony or terrace raised from the level of the lower garden on a series of stone arcades. Thus one can walk round a perfect square. The house forms one side of this square, the other is made by a hanging garden, the two flanks being nothing but thin arcades hidden in creepers. In the middle is a green courtyard, below the parks, the terraces, and gardens, and beyond the view.

You may wander far in many lands and see no such view as that from Trissino. To the south one's eye is carried down the broad valley of the Agno, which winds round Montecchio, and is lost in the faint blue haze of Lombardy. Behind the impenetrable Alps bar all horizon—huge weather-beaten crags, soaring like guardian eagles with snow upon

their plumage, above the sunny slopes of Italy. You can sit there on the raised garden gazing at the spectacle, with wild thyme blowing round your feet, and below you on the terraces a wilderness of oleanders and pomegranates, of lemon-trees and orange. For of these trees the garden is full, and in July at midday there was such a colour, such a scent and blaze, I almost thought myself back in the regions of an old impossible fairy-tale. I tried in vain to sketch any of its splendours, and then submitted to be taken through the house, which, like most houses one is "shown over," greatly oppressed me. There seemed to be an amazing amount of beds in that villa, where the passing stranger can picture nothing less romantic than guitars and nightingales after sundown. There was a surprising lack of geniality or comfort in these interminable rooms. The excellence of the prints upon the wall, the beauty of damask upon the chairs, were hopelessly obscured by their framings. Yet this earthly paradise might have been made one equally within and without. Its present owners prefer the city. "Up to the villa" they only come in autumn, and the cool air, the delicious fountains, the splendour of the flowers, are ignored by the inhabitants of a palace "down in the city" of Vicenza.

We gladly returned to the garden, and explored some few of its fascinating corners. Here were alleys

of hornbeam trees interlaced like Gothic arches, dark leafy places with unfathomable views of sky and plain caught through their windows. And here was a terrace, some two hundred yards in length, where oranges and lemons grew from big terra-cotta vases, and gardenia and heliotrope sprang up to meet them from the lower beds. All the white pebbles at our feet were strewn with little flames from the fallen flowers of pomegranate trees. But it is impossible to convey any just idea of these Italian terraces to those who have not seen them. I think that in a spot like this History first gave birth to Romance.

We then left the upper garden. A. had for the time become a child again, whose baby feet had toddled down these paths. He laughed, he screamed, he pulled pomegranate petals, and, spreading out his priestly robes, he ran so quickly down the pebbly paths I scarcely could keep pace with him. We passed through grottoes in the rock, cypress avenues, and cedars of Lebanon, until we issued through the ruins of the first villa which was struck by lightning many years ago, and came out upon the lake of Trissino. It is purely artificial, this lake, but I confess to a belief that no natural thing could be more fair. There is a large green plateau of about two acres, overgrown with grass and daisy flowers. In its middle is an immense stone basin full to its brim of water. Here a million gold-fish trifle with

the sun, and here the clouds are mirrored; here, too, a hundred lovers must have told their loves. There are statues—statues everywhere, rising at intervals along the pond, standing in rows along the parapets against the sky. They are grey rococo things, these statues. They bear resemblance to no human form or living creature. Eaten by time, carved at a wrong period of the arts, they are still entirely delightful. A shepherdess with a hat chopped off, stuck on awry, a Jove, a Juno, a Sophocles, I know not what, but all bathed in the light of an Italian afternoon, with growing grass about their feet, water and gold-fish, behind the cypress avenues, beyond the view.

With immense unwillingness we left that garden and returned to the street. Other gardens there may be in other hills, but none can have the charm peculiar to the garden there at Trissino.

We went into the church which stands on the very crest of the hill. Then we went on to visit the friends of A.'s youth. I have already lingered too long within the shades of Trissino, and the home of these people deserves a longer description than I can give it.

We entered a cool house with big stone halls and staircases. Here a whole family was assembled in the Italian fashion to receive us. I, being the only lady guest, occupied the guest sofa, where I sat

enthroned, relating my age and the price of my hat to my hostesses, and evading the too lavish hospitality of my exacting hosts. There was the father of the family, a magnificent gentleman with the face of a hawk; and his lady, on whose brow and portly figure Time had left no saddening lines. Their two grown-up daughters sat beside them; their student son served out the wine and cakes; and there was a little fair-haired grandson too. He rode a bicycle round the outer hall, and in and out of the parlour. Eve, the dark-eyed daughter, sat down to a jingling harpsichord into which her fingers brought a sudden soul. Outside a fountain splashed in the garden, and big tea-roses pushed in through the half-closed shutters. The son was a philosopher, but he copied Rembrandt, and also touched the harpsichord. As it grew cooler we went out into the garden, and sat in a green arbour, discussing the outsides of the universe. The daughters showed me their rooms, with stone floors, and iron frameworks embossed with roses and carnations in the place of washing-stands. No comfort was there in the apartment of the lovely Eve, but truly a painter's bedroom in the style of that Carpaccio gave St. Ursula.

It was now past four, and time to bid adieu to Trissino. The philosopher son accompanied us to our inn. He spoke with gaiety of life. He might have posed as a model for a rococo faun upon the

fountains up above, so unreal and pleasing a being did he seem. Fancy a philosophic faun! I almost believe, though, that he was one. He talked more readily of the mask he wore on Christmas Eve in the streets of Padua than of the studies he pursued within that city; and as we ran fast down that pebbly street his feet seemed like those of a hind, and A. puffed hopelessly in the rear.

We stayed to see some very beautiful ironworks in a small shop outside the town, then we drove on to Tavernelle, stopping in a thicket of the Venetian sumach to gather branches of that tree, hoping to convey it home with us. But the feathery fluff flew off, leaving the rounded leaves and bitter scent. The ground seemed literally full of herbs; southernwood abounded with silver thyme and rue; and here we found a large bushy clematis with a flower like that of a lemon. Indeed, the hills around Montecchio struck me as being well worth the visit of a botanist. Their fossils are, I believe, world-known. Montecchio was more awake in the evening hours, and buckets were in full swing around the wells. Every mile which separated me from Trissino was a sorrow. The last I saw of that delicious green *paese* was a dark mass of trees upon a spur of hill fallen asleep in meadows, and behind the mighty jags of Tyrol.

The plain seemed horribly hot. The train had been baking all the way from Milan. But there

comes a happy period in a hot day when you are able to ignore its degrees of temperature. I suppose, too, that after fourteen hours of constant "go," the human *casserole* refuses to boil, and assumes an even measure.

Vicenza looked a little rosier, a little more ideal, if that were possible, and the Monti Berici smiled as the sunset light covered them in a veil of gold. Bodies of huge clouds arose in bubbling piles, and, receiving the light of the setting sun upon their snowy breasts, flushed pink and golden, as did the earth, the mulberry-trees, the sulphur on the vines, the oxen at the plough. Thunderstorms were rolling heavily towards the sea, but all the western sky was clear and quiet.

We waited half an hour in Padua, leaving again towards nine. Still there was daylight in the sky, and the Santo's domes stood clear and blue against a bank of inky storm. An orange belt of intensest colour lay along the west, fork lightning played in and out of the east, and between the two sailed a large half-moon into the blue of coming night.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE BANKS OF THE ADIGE AND PALAZZO ROSSO

“Guai a voi quel giorno quando l'Adige s'alza dal letto.”—
PALEOCAPA.

WE always found a cool wind there—a breath of melting icicles carried down on the back of the river from the eternal snows where its waters had found their birth some days, some hours back.

Right through Gromboolia it runs, a mighty body covering a tempestuous soul. Lombard grasses, Lombard willows, rank tangles of a hundred southern plants flourish along its banks and bend to kiss the cooling flood. But it, remembering a mountain flora, bearing the embrace of primulas, of gentian, and of white sprayed saxifrage upon its lips, brushes these coarse plants a little roughly, as it seems, and goes its terrific way, swelling in enormous curves, with never a sound of wave, with no ripple against a stone, for its bed is spread with sand. A huge power suppressed, moving always onward to explore the Adriatic. Perhaps the same drops



Photo by Professor F. Trombini

VIEW TAKEN FROM THE TOP OF THE BANKS OF THE ADIGE

which filtered through a wooden pump in some distant village of the Tyrol will play about the feet of the Rialto or lap the steps of Doges' palaces in Venice.

For hours one can lie and wonder near those green shores. There is something undeniably enlarging to the human mind in the contemplation of big rivers. This platitude is so stale that I ought not to dish it up to a satiated public ; only the Adige, in its crossing of the plain, filled my mind with large and strange comparisons.

A road runs along the top of either bank ; and here for ever the donkey-carts crawl slowly, and the white oxen lumber by—great quiet beasts with an interminable calm in their dark eyes. Here small gigs rattle through the dust—a farmer or a *bersagliere* lounging in the right-hand corner—and peasant girls and children shuffle onward with bare feet. Always the same black mills for grinding corn float upon the current, and swifts fly screaming over and across.

On either side you see the tops or towers, and far below the plain. There is the terror of the thing. The Adige runs through no deep river-bed, but over an artificial mountain made by its own mad diggings on the hills. So when you drive along this road you look down upon all other roads—down almost upon the hills—and familiar objects are shown to you mapped out in squares.

I experienced an awful joy in driving myself along these banks. There, on midsummer afternoons, we rattled through the heavy sand. The Oracle might sit beside me and tell me of his veterinary successes in Vienna: I heard him not; I breathed deep of the cold delicious breath of that big river. It half maddened me. I saw phantoms of cool glacier caves, and little Alpine flowers grown in deep ravines. A desire possessed my soul to



ON THE BANKS OF THE ADIGE.

be amongst them. Gromboolia seemed so hot, so terribly hot and flat. I almost was disloyal to my southern love.

But this drive was a forbidden fruit, like my night-watches on the balcony. It could only be performed by stratagem and very rarely. These sunny boulevards have seen many mortal tragedies, and the Contessa and the Oracle shuddered at them. Usually I came under the shadow of the Adige by

the high-road or the small canals. I was always glad to come, as the Adige combined a visit to Palazzo Rosso, and Palazzo Rosso is an enchanted place. It fulfilled all my ideals of Gromboolian palaces.

This Palazzo is a broad square house built of red brick. It has small marble arches over the windows, and a flight of crumbling marble steps, arcaded halls and passages full of cool air. Once it commanded a view of the Adige, now it is shadowed and smothered by the colossal banks of that great river, which have been gradually growing ever since it was built, and one must climb to its topmost garrets to obtain a view of the yellow flood. The house was built originally for a member of the Pisani family. Its style is more beautiful and picturesque, its colouring more pleasing to the eye than that of Vescovana. It is the largest farm on the Pisani estates, and has the richest land. Once I went gleaning there, and in a few minutes I amassed colossal sheaves. For centuries it had been in the hands of tenant farmers. These people are not always of a scrupulous turn of mind, and the whole thing was gradually sinking into a state of decay and ruin. There were more bats than people in the palatial halls, the fields refused to render their due increase, their very hearts being squeezed dry year after year by planting the same crops in the same fields.

So Palazzo Rosso to my mind was a pleasing wilderness. I delighted in its desolation which the Contessa viewed with such disdain. One year I returned to the Doge's Farm and found that the pink palace by the Adige was in the hands of its mistress. Lean cattle were replaced by fat ones within its stables, the fields had been left fallow for a season, the hedges clipped, the ditches cleaned, the bats, the cobwebs, and the bricks evicted with the tenant from its airy halls. Indeed, the familiar "system" was already permeating the whole. I could not review with proper kindness all these changes, until I considered that no one could change the palace-front or alter the flow of the Adige, and many of my happiest hours were still to be spent at Palazzo Rosso.

Our time there was always too short, and we left it with regret. We had a drive of over eight miles from Vescovana. When we arrived in front of the stables I visited some favourite calves and an ancient bull without a tail, and then ran up the high banks of the Adige and lay down amongst the vetches and white clover which grew to its very brink. The grasses grew so tall and green above my head. The waters sang and murmured over the sand in the river-bed, and the immense sky shone. But the Oracle never left me long in contemplation of the Adige. He considered it a most pernicious folly. His black coat and impressive buttons appeared above

the grasses ; words of warning and a summons to tea called me away from the river and its dreams.

Tea at Palazzo Rosso was an *occasione*. The whole palace was gradually being cleaned, but in a cool upper room the Contessa had put a big deal table, some chairs, and a cupboard. There were cotton curtains in the window, but its ledges were of marble, and its view reached over Lombardy. In the cupboard we kept a spirit-lamp and tea. The salad sandwiches we brought with us in a piece of paper. The Contessa made the tea herself. I never tasted any like it. We drank it out of bowls which looked like doge's caps, and we sat on cheap and comfortable chairs. The plate had been bought in Milan. It shone like silver, and each piece cost from twenty to seventy centimes. The air was unusually cool in that abandoned palace. I wished we could have felt more absolutely like tinkers encamping in ducal halls. As it was we were *propria rustica*, as a young gentleman of the neighbourhood said to me concerning his bark-arbour. Sometimes the evicted tenant joined us—once a sarcastic priest. The Oracle thought us very low when at the end of this humble orgie he was commanded to bring in a copper *secchio* full of water. He could have cried to see his mistress dipping in the tea-things with her own pink finger-tips.

Tea over, I was able to leave the Contessa and the bailiffs to their tempestuous parleys, and to penetrate a certain waste and marshy land which was entirely overgrown by bulrushes and tall pink grasses. In Gromboolia bulrush seeds are collected, dried, and used for stuffing pillows. The down is very soft and warm. There *may* be bulrushes in England, but indeed they cannot attain to the colossal dimensions of those it was my privilege to gather on the marshes round Palazzo Rosso.

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Once on an autumn night a drama was enacted in Gromboolia.

It had poured and poured with rain for many days, and always it went on pouring. Up in the Alps the torrents had broken loose, and were hurling down their floods and boulders over the meadows.

The Adige was swollen, yellow, ghastly, but still, by its banks, restrained. A dread and a terror were in the minds of the people on the plain. They went up in the evening to the top of the banks and looked. Then they crept down, for a shudder passed through them.

And still it poured.

At midnight a gig rattled up to the gates of a lonely villa on the plain.

"The river has broken on the Rovigo side," said the man inside. "The people are mad—they are

coming across to open our lock, and let the flood into our land as well as their own. It's a horrible flood—but why should both sides perish?"

The lady of the villa arose. She ordered her horses, and she drove through the dark and the blinding rain. At dawn she stood on the banks of the Adige beside her lock.

She was a woman, but she stood there alone. And "Shoot, then, shoot!" she cried to the men on the opposite bank of the river.

They were all there, half mad with fear. They had their guns pointed at her, but they didn't shoot, and the flood went over their land and not over hers.

In the daylight the lady went back to her villa, and the troops came down from Milan and guarded her locks.

The fields of Gromboolia were dry.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE EUGANEAN HILLS

“Ay, many flowering islands lie
In the waters of wide Agony :
To such a one this morn was led,
My bark, by soft winds piloted :
'Mid the mountains Euganean
I stood listening to the pæan,
With which the legioned rocks did hail
The sun's uprise majestic ;
Gathering round with wings all hoar,
Through the dewy mist they soar
Like grey shades, till the eastern heaven
Bursts, and then—as clouds of even
Flecked with fire and azure, lie
In the unfathomable sky—
So their plumes of purple grain,
Starred with drops of golden rain,
Gleam above the sunlight woods.” . . .

“Lines written among the Euganean Hills,” by P. B. SHELLEY.

A CHANGE had come across the plain. A dead calm haze of heat had clung about the sky for days without the vestige of a cloud, without a ruffle of wind amongst the drooping leaves, save sometimes at midday a tiny timorous breeze. There was a



Photo by Mr. W. W. Vaughan

THE PERGOLA OF SHELLEY'S VILLA AT ESTE IN THE EUGANEAN HILLS

feeling of suspense in Nature's doings. The harvest fields were deserted even of gleaners. Gromboolia had sunk back into absolute silence and apparent solitude, save where by some farm the threshing-machine was working still, and a centre of life and bustle reigned.

One new beauty, however, was revealed on the bare and sun-baked breast of nature—that of the flowering Indian corn. Over every maize-field there was seen a shimmer of tasselled bloom. For miles and miles between ploughed fields the crop was ripening its pollen. There are few things more lovely than this blossom. Silver, gilded, grey, and opal green, composed of the tiniest flowerets, it rises above the tall forest of stalk and ribbon leaf, and lends a character new and pleasing to the countenance of the plain.

Already a touch of yellow—a half suspicion of autumn—had crept in amongst the spring green of acacias, and a crimson leaf was no rare sight upon the vine. In the ditches there was scarcely any water left—in the garden not a rose.

I now began to think with joy of a visit to the hills. In the blue Euganeans, which for so many weeks we had seen, quiet, gentle forms rising out of the plain, I pictured to myself a hundred fresh delights, and so determined to embark on travel.

A month ago, amidst a blare of trumpets and a clash of unmelodious cornets, the two young English

ladies had arrived in the Doge's Farm, and invited me to visit them in the Euganeans. I had never seen these ladies before, nor had I seen them since. They descended "unbeknownst" in their tiny gig at sunset from out the distant hills: they left again at dawn. But I had treasured their invitation within my heart, and watched the wandering of the moon till she should be full once more, and fit to guide us on the ascent of Venda. Then all my desires went out to Teolo and the tops of its high hills. I mustered courage, and wrote a note to my unknown friends, saying I did not care for milk or meat—the absence of which details they had lamented. I asked them only not to refuse my company for a night or two. In return for this boldness I received the kindest note of welcome, and a promise to meet me at Abano.

My friends and all the potentates of the dogedom shook their heads. Teolo, they said, was a heathenish *città*, also it was neither customary nor fit for *signorine* to travel in this neighbourhood alone.

I packed a modest hold-all, and drove Bandis to the station—in fact I was bent on going, and so defied Gromboolian conventionalities and went.

The stationmaster gave me a cool, empty carriage to myself, with strict commands to the guard that no one should enter it. It was awfully hot in that train, and as for the "blue hills" they might have



ON THE BANKS OF A CANAL. EUGANEAN HILLS SEEN IN THE BACKGROUND

been back in their primitive condition of burning volcanoes. They were dry and baked around their feet as though the plain were sucking dry their dewy streams. Arrived at Abano, I left the train and looked in vain for the ladies of Teolo. They were not there, but an elderly and affable carpenter presented himself with a note from them, regretting that as the drive was over two hours long they could not embark upon it at midday. So I got into the high gig of the carpenter, and rattled off through an avenue of plane-trees, full of the sense of adventure. A most miniature pony—a little adorable mouse of a creature—dragged us, and the carpenter enlivened the drive with excellent conversation. The country round Abano had been visited by a hailstorm the night before, and trees and crops were terribly tattered. Our wheels ran smoothly over a carpet of green leaves strewn in the dust. The heat was indescribable. Gromboolia paled by comparison. But the mouse trotted along at a great rate, and presently, to my surprise and joy, Praglia appeared above its walls. The carpenter suggested that I should go in and see the convent, to which proposal I gladly acceded.

There was an elegant gentleman loafing about under a white umbrella in the first cloister. He assisted me to alight from that very inelegant gig, and seemed anxious to divert his leisure hours in

conversation. But having no notion of who he was, I ignored his attentions, accepting instead those of a clown who issued from a neighbouring stable with the keys. The carpenter was moody, and regretted the society of the swell, who, he hastened to inform me, was the present proprietor of Praglia. For me it was pleasure sufficient to penetrate once more the mazes of that immense convent. It was built to hold over three hundred monks. It has six huge cloisters, two of which are built around the first storey, the centre of which, paved with massive stones, made one imagine oneself to be upon the basement. Terra-cotta friezes of intricate designs run under the tiled roofs, and wide views across the plain delight one's eyes at the end of each corridor. The place is still in pretty good condition, but every year will add to its decay.

At the east end of the refectory there is a Crucifixion by Montagna, perfectly preserved. Few portraits of St. John appear to me as full of soul and beauty as this one. With hands thrown back and eyes uplifted, St. John gazes in sorrow but in faith upon his dying Saviour. The carving, too, is fine in this long room, and angels cut in chestnut wood glow along the walls.

My companions were deeply appreciative. The carpenter was every inch a courtier. About the clown there hung the remnants of a dead gentility.

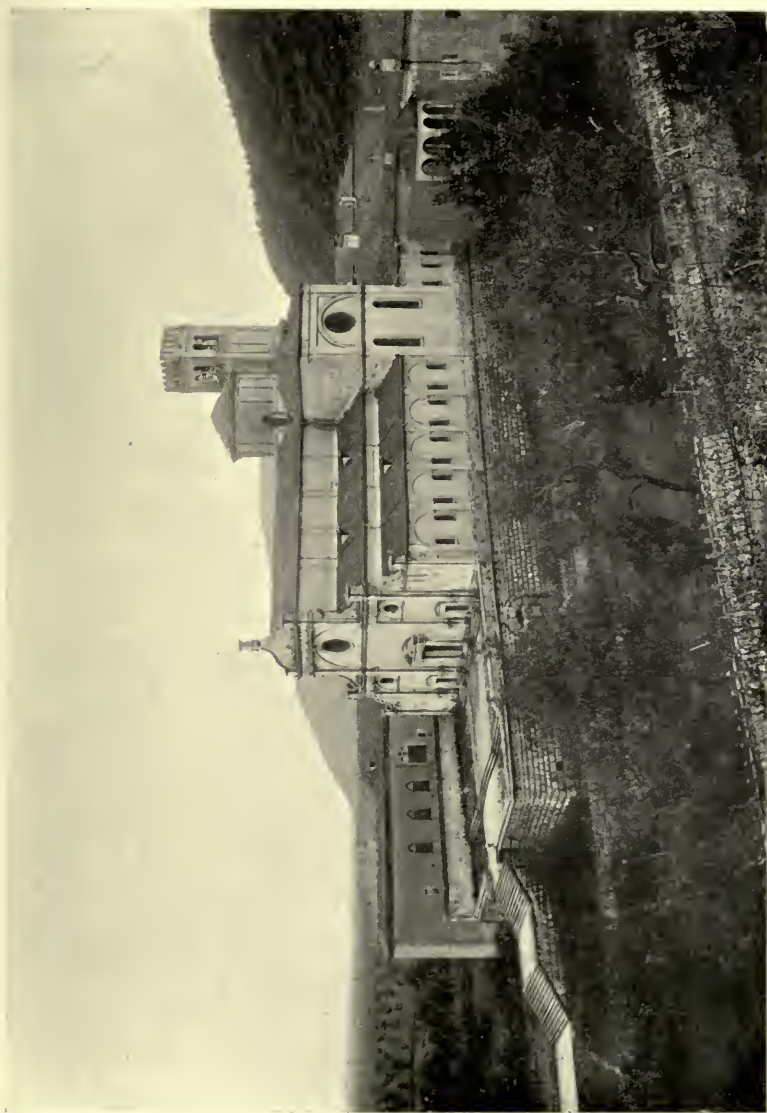


Photo by Alinari

THE CONVENT OF PRAGLIA IN THE EUGANEAN HILLS

It is his duty to keep some miles of passages and cells free from too much dirt. He was rather rough in his handling of sacred objects, and knocked down an archangel over the door of the refectory in his efforts to shut it tight. But he showed us a piece of painting I had missed before at Praglia—a Flagellation by Montagna. It is painted on the wall behind a closed bookcase. A thing more delicate in colouring, or more sweet in spirit, I have rarely seen. Hybiscus bushes were flowering wildly in the lower cloisters. Great flapping butterflies of pallid hues, these blossoms seemed, upon their darker foliage.

On leaving Praglia we bade adieu to the plain, and wound round the feet of that series of wooded volcanoes—the Euganean Hills. The flowers were very abundant and beautiful. Here were nice shady villas and cooling streams : dense pergolas of vine drooped in festoons above the doors of peasants' houses. And oh the songs of the cicalas !

But the chief thing which struck me on the drive was the glory of shadow. I could not at first dissect what thing it was which so satisfied my eye in that new country. Then, looking further, I realised that huge masses of blue shade were cast abroad, not from the vanishing clouds, but by the solid hills themselves. In Lombardy there can be no shade like this till that of the night covers it. So this is one of the greatest charms of mountain country. Much

as we mortals love the light, and need it, we enjoy it most by contrast.

We now reached the foot of Monte Grande, on the shoulder of which hill Teolo is built. The ascent is long, but the road most excellent, ascending in broad, smooth curves like those on a Swiss pass. Ailanthus-trees spread fan-like leaves on either side, and innumerable flowers grow on the chalky soil. Here the everlasting pea drags its long creeping stems, studded with pink bloom, over the bushes and paths, and tall blue campanulas push through trailing clematis. Pinks, white, red, and feathery, grow here in all their glory ; but how such fine and tender flowers can exist on that sun-baked soil is to me a marvel.

We drove through the village of Teolo. In the courtyard of the inn a party of fine Venetians were eating macaroni. It was evident that the "season" had set in. Ages had elapsed since last I slept there among the silkworms.

The carpenter and the mouse rattled down a deep lane, and then through some massive stone portals, and I alighted at the door of the Casa Baccaglini.

This is the residence of the *sindaco* of Teolo. It is built for all the world in the manner of a Swiss hospice—only with this difference, that it stands on the spurs of the most romantic and verdurous hills in Northern Italy. It is a grey

farmhouse. The rough stones look as though storm and frost were not unheard-of visitors in these dreamy regions. A troop of geese, a couple of cows, and many natives stray for ever in and out of its crumbling gates. Its owner, the *sindaco*, alternately sleeps, eats, cooks at fairs, performs both field and ministerial labours, or talks philosophy and gossips with his guests. His younger brother enjoys the same large intellect and capacity for taking part in every phase of human life. These two charming old bachelors live, so to speak, on the fat of the land. Their sister, a nun, whose health forces her to abandon her convent cell, cooks their meals and does some of the housework, and their little niece runs in and out of the hospice like a fairy creature. They were indeed a charming family, amongst whose midst it was a privilege to dwell: and the whole mysterious *ménage* struck me as being admirably arranged. For the four English ladies had brought with them an Udine *chef* and his Tuscan wife. The casseroles of the cook, and the boot-trees of his mistresses, mixed to perfection with the earthen pots and sabots of the two bachelors and the nun.

Miss D., in a large sun-bonnet, met me at the door. The rest of the party were taking an Italian lesson with the village schoolmistress. We sat down in a hot passage to tea, at which meal the others presently appeared. They were all very

quiet and kind and nice to talk to but it was absolutely unlike Gromboolia.

We immediately started forth upon a long walk up an indescribably steep hill. The atmosphere was boiling hot, but an icy wind blew through my light silk clothing of the plain, which garment speedily became a rag amongst the rose-thorns and the brushwood. We found the large wild rose of the Euganeans growing here in great abundance, and tall trees of myrtle scented the air as we crushed it in our scrambles. We entered a curious damp cave by the light of a single candle, which was soon extinguished in the clammy air, leaving us to scramble back through muddy ways. These very novel sensations from rock and chilly moisture were most refreshing.

In the late evening we returned to Teolo for supper. We were gleefully told by a Baccaglini brother that the table had been spread on the summit of a neighbouring hill. Thither we at once proceeded, and took our seats in the long grass round a square table. As a stormy night had set in, the air was like pitch. But garlands of hop and ivy were artistically hung from poles above our heads by the Udine *chef*, and that gentleman had further shown great skill in the composition of six Chinese lanterns which cast a lurid light upon our faces. With the first course came a clap

of thunder and a sheet of rain. We were compelled to seize our plates and precipitate ourselves upon the hospice. The table, the ivy, the hops, and the lanterns were seized by various natives, and followed us into the house, where our meal was then completed.

A native concert followed, and not till a late hour did we retire to bed. Sleep was at first out of the question, and not till long after the dawn had deadened the minds of night visitors did I obtain some short repose. For all the mosquitoes and midges of Gromboolia were taking their *villeggiatura* at Teolo. Never have I been put to such a test of human endurance, realising at last the drawbacks to tropical travel, but also its compensations in the sights I saw.

The young ladies of Teolo led the artistic life absolutely. They gave their souls to Nature and explored her most unknown paths. In fact they courted A.'s enemy—fever—in every possible manner. They rose at 3.30 a.m., and proceeded out among the misty hills to paint dewy Paduan landscapes till seven, when they returned to coffee (milk is attainable, butter scarce in Teolo). They then returned to their work till ten, when they entered the hospice and slept till twelve, at which hour they ate their midday meal of vegetables, pumpkin salads, and, if possible, some

meat. They returned to their beds till four, took tea and painted till eight, when, absolutely worn out, as one would imagine, they ascended to the summit of that little hill, where, in high grasses amidst the rising mists and heavy dew, their thin clothes covered by filmy Eastern shawls, they sat around the ivy-covered table, to pick at viands strange and new.

For the Udine *chef* was an artist in all things. *He* dished up no common viands, or unenticing puddings. His "plats" approached the miraculous. His beef assumed the plumage of a swan, his gingerbread was piled in Gothic arches, the windows of which were illuminated from within by unseen candles. Also he made fire-balloons, which sailed into the starlit sky to divert our attention between his courses. His wife in the meantime, with an orange kerchief tied square above her calm and very beautiful face, would sometimes sing us sad, slow love-songs.

Every night, too, the boy-musicians of Teolo would come playing up the lane from out the village, and these concerts made a deep impression on the audience. I shall often long to hear again those bird-like occarini—those little thrilling songs with madness in their chorus.

The young English ladies and their mother had a wonderful love for the native, which was evidently

returned. The small boys had been encouraged by them to use their musical gifts in harmony, not each alone in the fields. And the result was very charming. They play the occarino to perfection in these parts. That instrument is made for the open air and woody places. It is like the warbling of small birds, or gurgling streams in spring.

The orchestra of small brown boys sat gravely in a circle on the grass. Their repertoire was small, but then it was perfect. An inspired baker sat in their midst. He had the voice of an archangel, and sang long songs between-whiles, his head thrown back, his eyes closed in an ecstasy; and when his song was finished in came the occarini like little birds singing at dawn when the nightingale has ceased.

The music continued till the audience was too soaked by dew and bitten by mosquitoes, and the performers too hoarse and too satiated by wine, milk, and song to continue longer; then towards eleven the Spartan ladies would allow themselves some four hours of repose.

On Wednesday night there was to be no repose. On that night, or no other, we were to ascend Venda. The moon was waning fast. We needed every inch of her light for the rough ascent we contemplated. I cannot exaggerate the feeling of

excitement and joy which filled my soul when I realised the fact that one of my earliest day-dreams was to be fulfilled. Such things are certainly rare in life.

When first I read Shelley's "Lines in the Euganean Hills" the desire seized me to watch the sun rise over Northern Italy from the highest point of those volcanic hills. For two days and nights it had rained off and on—sopping summer rain which damped our hopes as surely as it ate into the ears of Indian corn. But on that afternoon the clouds rolled off like whales into the western heaven. The night closed in hot and damp. The little boys played divinely, and then went off along the lane. We, too, retired to our rooms—but not to sleep.

The Udine *chef*, who is also a physician, a philosopher, a singer, and a poet, pronounced rest before a night-walk to be a dangerous folly. Loud and melancholy songs arose, therefore, from himself and from his myrmidons in their precincts below our bedrooms until twelve, at which hour we hurried out to drink black coffee in the kitchen; and at 12.30 we started forth by the light of a feverish and waning moon along the slopes of Venda.

Signor Baccaglini accompanied us as guide. The air was warm and heavy-weighted, like a summer afternoon in England. Our road lay at first through

deep lanes, with hedges of acacia, dog-rose, and clematis on either hand. It was a broad, white road, ascending by easy curves to higher levels of chestnut grove. The country was peculiarly sad and still—if the mosquitoes of Gromboolia had come to live there, the nightingales had left it. The silence was profound. Before us the waning moon arose in a calm sky; but at our backs a deep bank of thundercloud, driven on by a thin hot wind, advanced steadily; and in all directions fitful and flickering patches of sheet-lightning came and went. We passed through a dense chestnut wood, where the light of the moon cast an almost chalky shimmer over the leaves, whilst the immense trunks stood black against the lighter grass. Then we came to Castel Novo. The village was dead asleep, and every shutter barred against us. The small church contains an altarpiece by Paolo Veronese. The *sindaco* told us certain things about the doings of this artist, whom he proved to be a great *canaille* and maker of inferior pictures. At this point we left the road, and struck into the ill-kept tracks and watercourses of Venda.

It was an intensely hot night. We had burdened ourselves with extra clothes. We stumbled up pebbly paths between hedges of dwarf acacia, muddy banks, and chestnut copse, which quite ob-

scured the moonlight and muffled in the air. Below us, at intervals, we caught glimpses of vast plains bathed in owl light, and an awful sense of fever and oppression came puffing up from these plains and lingered in the hills.

Six weeks of the above-described existence had not served to develop the walking powers of the young English ladies. They, however, walked bravely, but our guide, the *sindaco*, had lived too long on the fat of the hospice to be much of a mountaineer. He told me hopelessly that I was no Inglesina, but a Roman matron, from the development of the muscles in my feet. Some dogs attacked us with loud barking by lonely farms, where we stopped to rest, but they seemed frightened at the white dresses of my friends. We passed through stubble fields where the corn was stacked in heaps, and at length came out upon grass slopes and turfy mounds where the scent of thyme and bracken seemed to make the night air pure. I remember discussing with Miss M. at this point the rival merits of Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Mr. Henry James—so incongruous are the wanderings of the human mind and feet.

At 2.30 we reached the top of Venda. The storm was rolling away again, driven by a keen wind from the east. The moon sailed clear and very bright through a deep blue sky. Great planets

and constellations were dimmed by her radiance. But Mars shone like red blood.

The top of Venda is very broad and flat. It is covered on the extreme summit by chestnut brush; but all along the southern side runs an artificial plateau, the site of a huge convent and its grounds, now absolutely ruined and abandoned. That peculiarly smooth turf surrounds its ruins which adds so much to the charm of all mediæval dwellings. The thin storm-wind still blew over the hill—a wind turned to ice—in the black night air. It hurried the plaster about in the ruins, and went on and away to wrestle with the heated north whence we had come. To escape it we crossed those pleasant lawns and entered the ruins. Large in the daylight, they now seemed colossal. The tottering remnants of what were once high walls rose up from the precipitous hill, black, still crags against the moon.

We sat down on the grass-grown floor of the refectory. Its rose windows, bare now of traceries, let in owlsh gleams upon the faces of my companions. Bushes of sweetbriar swayed in the breeze, and about the walls dead grasses rustled and shook down their seeds. Through this black frame of masonry one surveyed the lesser hills and the vast moonlit plain hundreds of feet below. A more romantic spot it would be hard to find in

any corner of the globe, although, as I gather, ruins are out of fashion. But the chill and draught were terrible. Some of the party returned to the lawns, and there sank down in dreamy heaps upon their mackintoshes. Others felt happier on the move, and wandered away to the extreme point of Venda. We found all sorts of flowers under that clear moon—small anthericum lilies and pink vetches—and we rested on bushes of *fraxinella*.

There, then, in the chestnut copse we watched the birth of day.

After long waiting there came the dawn—a scarcely visible shimmer of white above the clouds in the eastern heaven: a thing which throbbed and trembled, seeming to shiver as it touched the reigning light of the moon. Even as you could not distinguish the exact birth of dawn, so it seemed impossible to trace its inevitable progress through the heavens. Only it struck me that for a minute the stars grew brighter, and everything became intensely cold and still. Then the wild thyme at our feet gave out a stronger scent, and one by one the watchers on the plain became aware of day. One by one church bells began to ring, till all the world seemed full of slow, sad, tinkling chimes, and the twittering of innumerable birds. Then these sounds died away. I saw that the moon was but a weak thing, and that the coming day was strangling her.

At last the sun clambered up over a bank of heavy cloud—a dull orange god who robbed the world of mystery, but filled it full of truth and splendour. I think there was no detail which his gilded fingers did not handle. But it is impossible accurately to describe that spectacle, even though one watched it from the very centre of a mighty amphitheatre. Sitting on the highest point of the Euganean hills, I tried with all my might to mark the splendour of a sunrise in North Italy.

First a vein of silver crept through the darkness along the western horizon : and that was the lagunes. Then against this line there started up a little hedge of inky needles : Venice and Chioggia ; the Lido next showed black upon that glittering water. Above them all the dawn vanished into the sun, and moon and planets died.

The moment was so fleeting one scarce caught it. One's eyes followed a pageant far more subtle than any shown by man. The plain for some few minutes was grey and void of detail till the sun rose upon it too, and first its rays caressed small wreaths of mist which had formed round the foot of every little hill, and then gilded the vapours rising from hot springs at Abano and Montegrotto. Lastly, they flooded the plain. The whole land caught the light : waters and mists, fields and trees, shone together in the great glory of the sun. To the

north-east the Alps stretched back, row upon row. You could count their scars and crags, and all their snows and watercourses, for in the whole air there was no mist. At a later hour these mountains vanished into purple shades, but at that instant their very hearts lay bare; and as for Padua, every minaret and dome stood out distinct. To the north were the Monti Berici. Each town and villa shone white among its trees. Thus three-quarters of the horizon—the Adriatic, Tyrol, and Venetia—were absolutely clear, but Gromboolia had huddled herself in a sort of torpid owl-light. It seemed a hopeless thing to seek for detail in that drowsy plain. As the sun came up the church bells ceased to ring. Though one could not see it, one felt that men's labour had begun in that great chessboard at our feet.

I think I have realised better from that hour what a world it is in which we have the luck to live, and what grand miracles surround us every day.

We left the hill behind us, and struck down another shoulder, straight upon the convent of Rua, which stands on a little hill alone, surrounded by high walls and groves of cypress and of pine.

It was a rather long tramp, but cool, and our path lay over arbutus brush and tall white bushes of Mediterranean heath. We sank down exhausted in the porch of the convent, with letters of gold shining over our heads to denounce the further

entrance of women. We were most hospitably received by the monks, who came out to meet us in their sandals and long heavy robes of white serge. They were friends of the *sindaco*, and had invited us to breakfast. They brought out a wooden table with a clean cloth and the most fascinating china marked with a blue cross; a bowl, too, filled to the brim with litres of fresh milk, hot coffee, and brown bread. The convent walls rose up behind us, tall cypress-trees peered over them. Below us lay the plain and the lagunes, Chioggia rising black against the dazzling light of day, and the smoke of passing steamers clearly seen. A charming German monk, pale as his clothes, waited upon us. He was deeply depressed by his surroundings. His eyes filled with tears on hearing once more his native tongue. "Yes," said this melancholy Teuton, "that's Chioggia, and those are the lagunes. There are plenty of cypress-trees in our garden—vines too. But these things are always the same—not like our woods at home. Have some more coffee?"

Thus one may even live on a Euganean hill, where

"Beneath is spread like a green sea
The waveless plain of Lombardy,
Bounded by the vaporous air,
Islanded by cities fair,"

and pine for Schleswig-Holstein !

We could not stay at Rua long, for the day was advancing, and we had a long walk before us, round the hills to Teolo. Our path lay through the most romantic chestnut woods and pergolas of grape. The day was cool. Before nine we returned once more to the hospice, having walked some seventeen miles. But the dawn had refreshed and entranced us, and we were unfatigued.

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The next morning, having slept very well, we were seized with the desire of ascending the Monte della Madonna, which I had been prevented from doing in May. Miss M. was fired by the same wish, and we rushed madly towards the summit of that peculiarly steep hill.

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Eight a.m. was certainly a late hour to start upon a mountain expedition on the 20th of July, and in those sun-baked plains. But slumber had refreshed us, and a great coolness was breathed upon the heated air by hedge and meadow after the rain of night. Pale saponaria, heavy with morning dew, opened its petals below the hazel copse. Things shone and sparkled ; a cool wind ruffled the chestnut leaves in the wood through which we passed. We ascended quickly, leaving the roofs of Teolo immediately below our feet, and scrambling up rough ways which in winter serve as watercourses, and show like scars upon the face of Monte

Grande. Then we came out upon the shoulder of the Madonna, and passed by vineyards and cultivated fields, and on into the everlasting chestnut copse by winding pilgrims' paths. At intervals there was an "Ave" rudely carved upon the stepping-stones where the devout may pause to pray. Most beautiful speckled moths and butterflies floated and played in the warm air around the white anthericums, the flowering mint, and crimson pinks.

At last we came out by the small church on the summit of the hill. Below us, to the north, unchecked by any mound, we suddenly saw the whole vast plain of Lombardy—a vision such as Venda cannot offer. Miles and miles, countless miles of blue, with here and there a fleck of white—a city—and beyond all these marble cities one larger and fainter than the rest, Verona.

Members of the Alpine Club may scramble up and down and risk their necks above a sea of crags and glaciers, stone ledges, and impossible arrêtes. Give me rather a little hill above the plain, with gently wooded sides and smiling lawns upon its crest, and let me sit there many a long and quiet hour, basking in the warm unclouded air. Nothing is half as sweet.

We could not see the Apennines or Alps; it seemed as though there were only sky round and

above this visionary plain, and to the south a thin glimmer over the lagunes. Venice was invisible, Padua and Chioggia we could trace—minute fairy towns, with the throb of their life borne up to our imagination only.

We lay down upon the smooth turf which grows up to the edge of the tiny pilgrimage church. It struck me that in that huge landscape at our feet men had done an immense amount of work; and without in the least altering its larger features they had successfully tattooed every inch of it by cultivation. I never can lose this impression when I look down upon a cultivated plain. It is so exactly the opposite of that left on one's mind by an Alpine view.

A broad grass parapet runs round the top of this little mountain. Passing round it you have your view unchecked only to the west where the back of Venda obscures the plain. Gromboolia, therefore, is invisible. A white cross stands on a little cairn upon the summit. Lilies and pinks grow around its feet, and we found the long white skin of a snake caught amongst their roots. Tall plants of evening primrose grow in the garden by the church.

"Oh, it seems to you beautiful here in July," said the *guardiano*, "but think of winter months. The snowstorms come up, they blow around my house, they cover it as with a sheet."

Snow—the very naming of the thing seemed impossible. Here was a summer hill, its breast heaving gently below the gauze of midday heat which covered it.

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That afternoon I said goodbye to Teolo, and the friends who had received me there with such geniality and kindness. Two of them went with me to Abano, and the carpenter drove us. The mouse seemed not a whit embarrassed by this load. Indeed, we rattled gaily down the steep hillside, where but some two months past an equal load had been dragged so dismally at dawn. We did not see my former acquaintance, the coachman clown. But I thought of him, of his roses, his bundles, and his oppressive steed, as we passed the abode of his adored. A flush of tamarisk was over the moat of that deserted palace. The carnation plants were all in bloom.

We stayed again to visit Praglia. The cheerful convent clown welcomed us with beaming smiles. He carried his gallantry towards us so far as to throw himself into a deep well, clinging, cat-like, to the brickwork, to tear away large tufts of maidenhair. Poor fronds, how fresh and green they grew amongst the fig-leaves on the remembrance of a spring long dead! The sunlight withered them in our hot hands. As usual all the

place was flooded through with sunlight. The clown knocked down the same archangel in the refectory, and dusty shafts of light and dying butterflies lingered on the floor. The light of afternoon pierced through the library windows, and rested on the picture of a forehead which indeed is here divine.

That was the last I saw of Praglia. With sorrow we left the great deserted convent, the sun upon its crimson roofs, the shades of evening creeping through its olive-yards upon the hill.

As we approached the station of Abano, and consequently civilisation, I gazed with sudden wild dismay upon my small luggage and general appearance. For my clothes had witnessed the midnight ascent of Venda and the morning climb of the Madonna, and were not such as to dazzle the beholder. A great fear seized me as I contemplated dragging all my country triumphs into an elegant first-class carriage. There was a large wicker basket with two kilos of fresh figs under one arm, my hold-all containing the immensely long roots of six rose-trees (the rose peculiar to the Euganean district) under the other, and in my hands I held a colossal bunch composed of every flower that blows upon the hills at Teolo, with two more bundles of roots, and an erection of dried grasses presented to me by the schoolmistress of that village,

a thing most terrible to behold and ten times worse to carry. However, as the train steamed into the station a familiar broad-beamed beaver, surmounting a friendly visage, and a pair of flopping sleeves waving madly from a window of the train, announced the presence of A. I bade adieu to my companions, in whose society I had spent such pleasant hours, and, regardless of adverse criticism, carted all my vegetables into A.'s compartment. This gentleman, having informed me first that I had grown extremely ugly during my residence in the hills (a fact which was absolutely correct, for my face was rendered scarlet by long walks under a July sun, and the dainty tattooing of mosquitoes), commenced an uninvited attack upon the figs. His humour was sunny, for he had been worrying his friends at Padua, and had secured several uninteresting-looking volumes from the archives of that city. He had been out on a lark, and was returning without fever.

We reached Vescovana at eight. Never had the Doge's Farm seemed so full of joy and peace. The shadows of evening were creeping through its gardens. Its inhabitants surrounded me and all my trophies with a kindness very pleasing to my spirit. The roses had been born again. The air was full of a fragrance fainter and almost sweeter than that of early spring. My room was a garden for the gods.

Far away through the open windows I saw the night come over the blue backs of sleeping Euganean hills, and I remembered that the little boys of Teolo were coming up the street that hour to play upon their occarini.



THE WALLS OF ESTE IN THE EUGANEAN HILLS
[From Professor Butler's "*The Lombard Communes*"]

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CHAPTER XX

LAST DAYS

NATURE, in these last days, has grown most wonderfully still. That gilded heat has gone from the air ; there is an absolute distinctness in every object. June is long dead. On this earth one season is usually spent in looking for signs of the next, and in July I have seen autumn.

This afternoon we drove to the "Fontana," which is the last farm where the threshing-machine had to work. Everything was finished before we arrived, and the place was very dead and silent, though all the men and women still lingered on the threshing-floor, hanging about in groups. You saw that the harvest was over and done for this year. The workers sank down upon their sacks, the slim girl leaning against her lover. Above them the pergola spread, drooping heavy with grapes.

There was a dead, dull look about the machine. The *machinista* put its boards together with a sort of sorrow. Every one looked tired, but chiefly depressed or gone back to that state of indifference

which marks these men in ordinary life. There cannot be always excitement, and then they had got to marry, which is a more serious matter than courtship in a stubble field. Later in the evening I met them straggling home in couples along the bank of the Adige. No one smiled.

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In the garden there is a whole new birth of flowers, gladiolus of innumerable shades, sunflowers ten feet high and more, blue agapanthus lilies where day lilies once had been, and a glow and a glory of zinnias over every bed. It would be difficult to find a soil more suited to these splendid flowers than that of Lombardy. There are huge trees of pink hibiscus, crimson Cape myrtles, red-hot pokers, and countless convolvulus. Indeed, things of more colour and a greater endurance than those fragile blooms dear to our hearts in spring.

The granaries are full of grain, the cornfields brown. Scarcely a gleaner even in the line of stubble where the straw was stacked.

Courtship is over. The nights are almost silent. Young birds have spread their wings, tadpoles have turned to tiny frogs, and these again have grown large. The fireflies give no light, save where here and there one twinkles in a rose-bush out of season. As for the nightingales, they have grown hoarse and

almost ceased to sing ; sometimes a croaking cuckoo flies off startled at his own cracked voice. The dragon-flies must all be dead, the bees seek honey in the beds, for the flowers of the vine have turned to grape, the Virginia creeper is covered by big berries. The leaves on the willow and poplar have grown stiffer ; small winds scarcely make them tremble. The ditches are bare, and the water-snakes cross over the withering grass disconsolate.

Indeed, all nature has had its springtime and is resting. That throb and rush of intensest life which filled the whole land in June is dead. The heart of summer is laid bare to the sunlight of interminable days. Two more months and it will burn in the light of autumn, and winter follow and spring, and the old miracle of harvest be worked once more about the Doge's Farm.

So with the flowers of a lowland summer I too went, turning to greet a second summer in the Alps. Little strings pulled at my heart. I loved the mountains, but very well I had learned to love the plain, and the joy which only Italy can give was strong within my soul still.

The dogs and I walked out for the last time amongst the fields. The cool voice of the Adige was calling, but all the land was dry. Stubble and clods, clods and stubble, and a strange Sunday silence over the tired land.

EPILOGUE

“I climb’d the roofs at break of day ;
Sun-smitten Alps before me lay.

I stood among the silent statues,
And statued pinnacles, mute as they.

Perchance, to lull the throbs of pain,
Perchance, to charm a vacant brain,
Perchance, to dream you still beside me,
My fancy fled to the South again.”

TENNYSON, *The Daisy*.

THUS, then, I left Gromboolia and took my train for Milan. But one last look I gave towards the plain, and in the early morning climbed the Duomo stairs. There, standing high amidst the airy multitude of marble forms, I looked forth upon the mighty panorama, and bade farewell to Lombardy. But my eyes lingered towards the east which held the Doge’s Farm. Faint blue plain, faint blue sky, with no horizon line to mark where the two embraced—a city and a sea of fields, and over all that absolute calm and haze which form the charm of Lombardy.

A few hours more, and I was up on the southern

side of the Gotthard, amongst the chestnut groves which spread huge branches over mountain meadows and mossy hamlet, where white cascades dash down from upland snows to shine amidst deep shadows and impenetrable pine.

But far back I knew the stubble fields were sleeping under the same sun as gilded all the boulders on the granite mountains. And as the gates of the unforgiving Alps closed in upon me, shutting tight the entrance back upon Italian valleys, I thought of the plain below them, of the long white roads, white oxen, whiter clouds ; of the willow hedge, the ditch, the golden threshing-floor, and of those happy summer days spent on a Doge's Farm.

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